

**GOVERNMENT AGENCY EFFICIENCIES**

*Motion*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [11.28 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house considers the effectiveness exhibited by government agencies in —

- (a) applying the expensive and finite resource of officers' time in —
  - (i) membership of management committee or boards of community or industry representative organisations; and
  - (ii) attending external meetings generally;

and

- (b) monitoring the use of grant moneys provided to community organisations.

*Meetings, Bloody Meetings* was the title of a John Cleese training film that I used as an aid when I was running management courses in another life! That marvellous production illustrated the futility, waste of time and the pointlessness of meetings for the sake of meetings—meetings with thoughtless mechanical agenda items and meetings with no purpose defined or understood. I am sure that members here can relate to all of this. Consider the average ALP branch meeting—no wonder!

**Hon Ken Travers:** They are never a waste of time!

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** No wonder members opposite come in here appearing so jaded, world-weary and embittered! That is in contrast of course with Liberal branch meetings, which are always robust, meaningful and positive affairs, though there may have been some alas —

**Hon Kate Doust** interjected.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Let me say it is no surprise that having endured some of those, members on this side are harder and tougher than you lot on the opposite benches! Be that as it may, meetings are an essential feature of human interaction. The formal business meeting is an indispensable element in our lives. I am sure we would all agree that government officers need to attend meetings if there is a reason for being there, if there is a purpose for the meeting and if an outcome is required via the agenda items. It is a fact that humanity is destined to waste time in unnecessary meeting attendance to some degree—always has; always will—and that is a matter for an individual's time management. I do not want our civil servants wasting their time—our time. But what I am concerned about today is not the occasional or even the endemic waste of our employees' time, it is that the public interest is not necessarily being represented where it needs to be represented. Increasingly, as the public sector has developed over time, we have seen a range of different service delivery mechanisms. Our public sector is increasingly becoming more and more skilled and it is overseeing outsourced functions in road maintenance, medicine and a range of other activities. But what about supervision with respect to outsourced policy? I do not think that issue has been recognised or is being tackled in our community—it needs to be. In the very brief time available to me I want to get the house and members thinking about this. I want to bring it to the attention of government to get it thinking about it.

The recent Healthway fiasco involving West Australian Opera and *Carmen* is a classic example of what I am talking about. Already, there is acceptance and recognition in government that the charter for Healthway may well need to be looked at. Large sums of money are entrusted to it at arm's length for the delivery of policy, but whose policy? Is it the policy that the government of the day, as a reflection of the public, wants to see implemented? That is the sort of thing that needs to be supervised and monitored before it goes off the rails. I ask: what other entities receive public funding ostensibly for advocacy or awareness purposes? Those funds end up being applied to pursue policies that may not necessarily be the policies of the Western Australian people, the government of the day; and to whom are they accountable? Questions arise such as why they receive this money year after year. Is there any ongoing monitoring that they are doing what we want them to do, or indeed do we want them to do anything in that space at all? They become self-perpetuating, very expensive, and they have another thing in common—they all try to intrude on Western Australians' lives. As ordinary people we try to go about our business, but there is no shortage of government-funded agencies or quasi-agencies telling people how they should live their lives or even what they should think. Why and to whom are they accountable? Do public officers attend some of their meetings or, on occasion, some of their "bloody meetings"? Perhaps this is a matter that our Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations might want to take up—just a little food for thought.

In the limited time I have today I want to raise a specific example relating to a report sent to me by someone who is concerned about the RSPCA. It is someone who has had a great deal of historic exposure to that organisation

and, I am sure, cares for it very deeply. The report touches on a number of matters, which I have not investigated. Indeed, I may well take some of these matters up with the office-bearers of the RSPCA, and others. I have not looked for the other side of the story in the report that has inspired me to raise this matter today. I do not have a view about whether the RSPCA at this time is being well run or not. Like most Western Australians I have a default position, which I have always had and Western Australians have had for over 120 years, that we presume that it is being well run, and for the proper reasons, and that is why we support it. Some concerns raised with me have challenged that position, which I will follow up at another time. It raises some concerns in light of what I have been talking about this morning. Is there danger present when public moneys are involved and when public policy impacts on people's freedom? That is what is at stake.

The RSPCA is a unique organisation in Western Australia. It has a singular position. I have been reminded that it has endured through 122 years since its formation. Governor Sir William Robinson was its first president, and successive governors have been its patron. Its objectives have remained unchanged since inception; that is, to promote animal welfare and kindness to animals, to prevent or suppress cruelty to animals, and to do all such lawful acts as the society may consider conducive or incidental to the attainment of these purposes. Is that not lovely? Its statement of purpose is succinct and, even now, 122 years later, just as easy to identify in my heart and mind, as I am sure it has been for all those generations of Western Australians who have come before and supported the RSPCA. I am advised that from 1892 to 1922 the RSPCA had no power of prosecution. It appointed an inspector but it was primarily a voice of the community to bring attention to abusive animal practices. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, firstly in 1912 and then again in 1920, provided some unique powers to the organisation, which I have already alluded to. The RSPCA was the only non-government agency given the power of private prosecution for offences at law. The RSPCA was named in the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. It managed that responsibility with diplomacy and respect for many years.

I am advised that in 2002 the Animal Welfare Act replaced the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The Animal Welfare Act stripped the RSPCA of its independent power of prosecution, transferring all of its functions and powers directly to inspectors, who were appointed by the director general of the relevant department, which of course is the Department of Agriculture and Food. That is set out in section 37(1) of the Animal Welfare Act. I understand that many animal welfare inspectors have been appointed by the director general of Agriculture, including about a dozen employees of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The Animal Welfare Act provides that, under section 33, the director general is to appoint RSPCA staff nominated by the RSPCA but the terms of the appointment and the revocation of appointments are with the director general, not the RSPCA, as contained in the relevant sections of the act. As I say, I am now interested in making and motivated to make some other inquiries separate from these proceedings to find out how this robust and well-regarded organisation is going about its business in 2014 on behalf, I think it is fair to say, of all Western Australians. I will come to that away from this debate. However, for the purpose of today and to stimulate some further debate and, I hope, investigation, I want to raise the question of what happens if government and RSPCA policy differ or somehow become divergent because of a change of policy by those running the RSPCA. RSPCA policy is not law. In this state, this organisation has been mentioned in acts of Parliament for more than 100 years. That is the sort of standing it has. It was vested with powers by this Parliament to do certain things long before outsourcing became the order of the day. It has received and continues to receive a large amount of public funding both by direct grants, Lotterywest moneys and so on in pursuit of its policies, presumably because those policies are consistent with the public interest and with government policy. In doing that, I am advised that, historically, the RSPCA board used to include the director general of the ag department—not the office boy or the third assistant clerk, but the director general.

The board also included the Commissioner of Police—not the local community liaison officer or the junior office clerk from the traffic branch, but the commissioner. It also used to include a vet. I am surprised to learn there is not a vet on the RSPCA board any more, if my information is correct. I do not know who is on the RSPCA board now but I am advised that it does not include the sort of government representatives who have been there in the past going to regular meetings for very good reasons. I ask: who is protecting the government's and the public's faith in this organisation and who is ensuring that our money is being applied to its intended purposes?

I want to make clear that I am not picking on the RSPCA today. It is an example that has been brought to notice whereby government needs to say, "Hang on, we had better look at this." We have a very responsive Minister for Agriculture and Food, for example; indeed, this government comprises several responsive ministers. These are questions that need to be asked. Increasingly, as we outsource, in effect, policy to these arms' length organisations, we have to understand that we need some accountability. I am concerned, and I am seeking reassurance, that mechanisms are in place to make sure that our money is being applied in the right way and not syphoned off for someone else's pet project or private interest. I simply leave the debate open to that and look forward to the response and involvement of other members.

Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Alanna Clohesy; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Jacqui Boydell

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**HON ALANNA CLOHESY (East Metropolitan)** [11.44 am]: Thank you for the opportunity, Hon Simon O'Brien, to debate this motion. I have to say that, quite frankly, I am baffled by the purpose of this motion. Hon Simon O'Brien's contribution was very wide ranging and, at times, entertaining, but it left me still very unclear about exactly what he was concerned about in relation to the effective and efficient monitoring of government grant moneys for non-government organisations. I have had a bit of a stab at it. In trying to make my way around the purpose of the motion I think that perhaps he is concerned that government officers are spending too much time at meetings. If that is the case, I commend him for being concerned about the efficient and effective use of government resources, but I wonder whether this was his concern when he was the Minister for Disability Services, for example. How many meetings did he attend when he was Minister for Disability Services? How many meetings did his staff and members of the Disability Services Commission attend on his behalf monitoring the efficient and effective use of government resources? I think he will find that, for the most part, there is efficient and effective use of government resources monitoring the way government spends its dollars.

I suggest also that this motion is baffling because there is no evidence to suggest that government officers are serving on boards and committees. I will get to the RSPCA in a minute. When we were trying to work out what this motion was about, we thought we would ask the community sector whether there was evidence of government officers sitting on boards and management committees rather than using their time wisely. One person from the community sector indicated that they were not aware of any government officers on community or industry boards as representatives. They told us —

One of the great strengths of the relationship between the NFP Community Services Sector and the WA State Government is the constructive working together to support the marginalised and vulnerable and to improve the efficient allocation and utilisation of resources. Part of that invariably includes Officers attending meetings with a wide array of people and organisations. In many ways, we are the envy of other States in terms of the constructive relationship between Government and the Sector.

The community sector is not aware of any negative issue around this. They are not aware that government officers are misusing their time; they are not aware that it is not an efficient or effective way to work with the sector.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order, members!

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** There is no evidence that government officers are misusing their time. In fact, it is a criticism of the highly effective government officers who do their jobs day in day out to the best of their ability and extremely well to suggest that they are misusing their time. It is a slap in the face.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Are you saying I've suggested that?

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** Certainly, Hon Simon O'Brien's motion indicates that there is no efficient and effective use of government resources.

**Hon Michael Mischin** interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order members! Hon Alanna Clohesy has the call.

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** Of course we know that there can be a very productive relationship between the government, the community sector and industry representatives to identify plans and community needs and to develop policies that are responsive to community needs. We know that is an efficient way to use government resources. We also know that the best outcomes are achieved when the government works in partnership with the community sector and with industry in order to arrive at programs and plans that are wanted and needed and that are efficient and effective.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** What is a community sector?

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** A really good example of this, Attorney General, is the partnership forum that works collaboratively with government—the community sector working collaboratively with government.

Here is a quote from the website of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support—I can give members the address later—that refers to the partnership forum. It states —

The ... Partnership Forum is to bring together leaders from State Government agencies and the not-for-profit community sector to improve outcomes for all Western Australians through a genuine partnership in the policy, planning and delivery of community services in Western Australia.

The Partnership Forum is working to fundamentally change the relationship between the public sector and the not-for-profit community sector. The goal is to create a strong and genuine partnership built on respect and a shared responsibility for building a better society for all Western Australians.

There is an example of an efficient and effective use of government resources in working together with the not-for-profit community sector in Western Australia.

The sector is also concerned, as I am, about the second part of the motion that refers to monitoring the use of grant moneys provided to community organisations. I am pleased to say that the mover of the motion identified the RSPCA as an example to which government grant moneys have been offered, accepted and used in a way to advocate on behalf of the animal welfare sector.

**Hon Jim Chown:** And you reckon that's a fair thing? Is that what you're saying?

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** The point I want to make with the mover of the motion is his concern about money being used on advocacy and that the advocacy of some agencies is not the same as the policy of the government. I make the point that a government that is committed to democracy, to robust debate and to listening to the views of all members of the community would make sure that there is a health advocacy sector in order to ensure that the range of views are heard and listened to. That is the point of it. The other point of advocacy, of course, is that there is ongoing monitoring of the government's position on a range of things. Again, that is healthy in a democracy, that is healthy in a community, and it is a really important role that the government should support openly and widely. Of course, the RSPCA is only one example of that. There are hundreds of thousands of strong advocates across Western Australia on a range of issues that are not confined to the community sector.

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [11.54 am]:** Firstly, I thank Hon Simon O'Brien for bringing this matter to the house. I must admit that when I first read the motion, I did not quite know where he was leading with it but the RSPCA issue raised by Hon Simon O'Brien piqued my interest.

I have raised my concerns about the RSPCA in this place on a number of occasions and asked a number of questions. The main reason for that is that the RSPCA plays a very important role in animal welfare in our community and also in animal welfare education. The agency is in a unique situation in that it is afforded some government powers of prosecution and is able to execute prosecutions. It is granted half a million dollars a year from the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia, and it is also granted sums of money through Lotterywest and other grants. It therefore has a lot of money granted to it over a year from different government sources.

What has concerned me a lot, though, is that the governance and supervision of the RSPCA, to my mind, have been somewhat lacking. If we want the RSPCA to continue to serve the community well and to educate the public on animal welfare issues, there needs to be some accountability and some control over the RSPCA to make sure that it stays on point in serving the community. The Animal Welfare Act 2002, as I understand it, is administered by DAFWA. There is no provision in that act that gives power to the RSPCA to prosecute in its own right. I asked some questions a little while ago about who the prosecuting agency was. Officers are appointed by DAFWA to investigate cases of animal abuse; however, there does not seem to be any supervision whatsoever from DAFWA in overseeing those prosecutions. Therefore, the RSPCA has just gone away and to my mind is doing its own thing. It is doing its own investigations and undertaking its own prosecutions without any oversight or supervision from the Department of Agriculture and Food; and that worries me. That worries me a lot because there is public money involved and we do not really have any account of where that money is being used. One question I asked was about the education unit. One of the terms under the grant agreement is that the RSPCA should maintain an education unit. I have a note with me from the RSPCA website, one part of which is a little perplexing to me because the answer I got to my question was that the education unit was in fact operating. However, this clause states —

Since conducting the review the panel has been informed that all members of the education team have been terminated from employment. The panel therefore qualifies its comments with a proviso that all new members of the education team must be certified as competent in animal care and use in accordance with the requirements of the Code before the teaching activities can be resumed.

Obviously at some stage the entire education unit staff had been terminated. A number of inquiries about this matter have come into my office. The reason I raise it is not just because of me; it is because of the inquiries I am getting in my office. I have to raise those concerns as my constituents are saying that they have concerns over this matter. I really feel that DAFWA needs to be more proactive in overseeing the RSPCA on where the grant money is going, whether it is abiding by the grant agreement and the prosecution procedures that it is required to abide by, and whether it is serving the community as it should.

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I read again today in the *Farm Weekly* that the Pastoralists and Graziers Association wishes to carry out a cull of horses. From what I can gather, it is actually on Aboriginal lands that the horses are causing a problem. I know that last year a major aerial shooting program was —

**Hon Jim Chown:** A cull.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** — to cull a large number of horses that were suffering on overgrazed land. When water holes were drying up, these horses were being caught in mud and dying a terrible death.

**Hon Jim Chown:** It was around Lake Gregory.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** There you go! It was around Lake Gregory. I thank Hon Jim Chown for that. These horses were suffering, so to reduce the number was humane and good at not only an environment level, but also many other levels. However, the RSPCA is restricting the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which I am sure Hon Peter Collier knows about, from progressing. Now is the time of year to undertake the cull, before things start to dry out, the horses start to foal and the waterholes dry up; otherwise, a lot of these animals will suffer a terrible death from being caught in the mud and dehydrating or starving. The RSPCA is standing in the way of that now. It wants a report on last year—it had a whole year to do it—to look at the procedures that we should have for the cull this year, and they will not be ready until April next year. During that time, these horses in the north will suffer a lot. I am very concerned that through outsourcing government services to the RSPCA in its unique position, there is not enough governance in overseeing this organisation.

Another thing about which I have concerns—this has been raised with me by an RSPCA member—is that the constitution rules of the RSPCA were changed at the end of 2013. The way that this has been summarised is that the changes were major changes in that —

- 1 The number of elected RSPCA members to the Board was reduced to 7.
- 2 The quorum for a Board of 7 is 5. Decisions are made by the majority, which means since 2103 without any additional members appointed to the Board any 3 members may direct RSPCA.
- 3 The provision to appoint the Commissioner of Police (or his nominee) to the Board was removed.
- 4 The provision to appoint the Chief Executive of the state government department (currently DAFWA) ... There is now no nominee.
- 5 The direct links with government to influence animal welfare have been removed after 25 years of concerted efforts to build influential bridges.
- 6 The provision to appoint a veterinarian was removed. There is now no vet on the Board, almost an unthinkable omission for the RSPCA.
- 7 The position of Treasurer was removed. The powers of Treasurer were transferred to the CEO.
- 8 The Board can now appoint to the Board any 5 other persons they want —

The seven board members can appoint another five members of their choosing —

They need have no connection with RSPCA, need not be members, need never be members, but will be “deemed to be members” while on the Board. They will all have the full powers of an elected Board member including the power to appoint other non elected persons to the Board like themselves.

- 9 If there are then 12 members on the Board (including 5 appointed persons), then a quorum is 7 and a majority of 4 (none of whom need be elected by or represent the members) can hold the power to direct the RSPCA ...

I think that is dangerous. The RSPCA plays a vital role in the community; has the powers of prosecution and an expectation from the community that if anyone mistreats an animal, it will take them to task; and receives significant government funding over a 12-month period from various government quarters. An organisation such as that should not be directed without any oversight. That is a major concern. I am very pleased that Hon Simon O'Brien has also received some of this correspondence—it is not only me—and that other members are becoming aware that we really need to make sure that we bring all these organisations to account, that government money is being spent correctly and that the services that are provided to the community are good for the community.

**HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Agriculture and Food)** [12.03 pm]: Honourable members have raised an issue that is affected by the Department of Agriculture and Food as the department

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administers the Animal Welfare Act 2002. I have also had concerns about the RSPCA brought to my attention and I know the issue has been brought up in this place before. I want to reiterate a few points of how the RSPCA is operating at present. The director general of DAFWA is able to appoint inspectors under the Animal Welfare Act 2002. Hon Rick Mazza is absolutely right; those inspectors who are appointed under the Animal Welfare Act to work for the RSPCA are the only inspectors who are able to prosecute. However, the RSPCA cannot just appoint inspectors; inspectors must be appointed by the department under the Animal Welfare Act. These inspectors are then considered public officers and expected to discharge their duties in a professional, accountable and objective manner.

I am aware that some members have raised concerns with my department directly about the way the duties of the RSPCA are carried out. I am also aware of concerns raised about inconsistencies in policy and practice between enforcement agencies. DAFWA works with the RSPCA to provide that training, as I alluded to, including through the provision of a Certificate IV in Government (Statutory Compliance), to a number of the RSPCA inspectors. The member is right that DAFWA supports the RSPCA in a grant agreement of some \$500 000 a year. This agreement requires, among other things, that the RSPCA inspectors undergo training and compliance and enforcement activities relating to companion animals. That is important because the RSPCA tends to be leaning towards looking after commercial animals rather than what everyone believes they are looking after, which is the dogs and cats and small companion animals of the world. This \$500 000 is taxpayer funding. As this money comes from Western Australia, it must have a return on investment in achieving animal welfare outcomes. This is why I plan to take to cabinet a decision to review animal welfare investment and administration. The proposed review is expected to take three months from commencement and will provide the government with advice on whether the delivery model and expenditure of the state's money represents the best value for the dollar. It will also look at whether there is a consistent and appropriate approach to the administration and enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act, and, if not, how it can be achieved. It is appropriate and timely that we consider and monitor how we can best achieve our outcomes for the money available. At the end of the day, we are responsible for ensuring that taxpayer funding is spent wisely.

I assure members that this government takes animal welfare issues very seriously. One of the issues that Hon Rick Mazza raised was the horses up in the Kimberley. In the last cull some 7 000 horses were shot. Unfortunately, this year it is a bit too late as the wet season is already approaching and the weather there is already well and truly in 41-degree temperatures. We had some issues brought to us by the RSPCA in Broome; it was interesting that it demanded that the government put some officers up there. In doing that, the officers from my department went to Broome and responded virtually the next day to what was, I guess, something that is probably happening in lots of communities throughout the state. We gave funding of \$75 000 over three years to the Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation for an education process. There was no point handing out to everyone a heap of fines that were not going to get paid. It was more important that the funding to that Aboriginal corporation be used to start an educational process in the town and the communities. That is one of the ways we need to go in the future.

I have also established an Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to advise on policy, education, community attitudes and emerging animal welfare issues. I know Hon Simon O'Brien started with "meetings, meetings, meetings!", but I assure members that the committee has met twice. It is chaired by Eric Ball and has seven members, including representatives from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association, the WA Farmers' Federation and the Australian Veterinary Association.

It is an important committee that actually gives us some direction. Hon Rick Mazza was absolutely right when he said that people who used to be on the RSPCA board, such as the Commissioner of Police and a vet or their nominees, are very much missed. Interestingly enough, the way that the RSPCA changed its constitution was raised and the Department of Commerce made inquiries into the process the RSPCA used to endorse those rule changes. The Department of Commerce did not identify any significant process breaches and endorsed the new RSPCA rules on 18 December 2013. My concern is that under the RSPCA's rule changes it does not have a veterinary officer, the Commissioner of Police, the director general of the Department of Agriculture and Food or their nominees on its board. That breakdown concerns me. We will certainly look at that. Incidentally, the Department of Agriculture and Food spends \$1.97 million a year on animal welfare. That is in saleyards, trucking and the livestock compliance unit. The livestock compliance unit is wide and covers stock stealing, and where that has gone is a debate for another time. I believe that this inquiry will determine where we should be going and the best use of the Animal Welfare Act 2002. The legislation is well and truly due a review of how it is administered.

**HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural)** [12.11 pm]: I must say that I noted Hon Simon O'Brien's motion, but I am slightly confused about what the member is trying to achieve with it.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** It won't stop you getting up and flogging your gums!

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**Hon DARREN WEST:** The member may very convincingly argue that it does not take much to confuse me sometimes, and I am certainly confused about what Hon Simon O'Brien's motion means. The motion states —

That this house considers the effectiveness exhibited by government agencies in —

- (a) applying the expensive and finite resource of officers' time in —
  - (i) membership of management committee or boards of community or industry representative organisations; and
  - (ii) attending external meetings generally;
- and
- (b) monitoring the use of grant moneys provided to community organisations.

I wondered to myself what the honourable member means by all of this. It sounds fair and reasonable that we probably should be a little more careful about how officers' finite time is used and its cost. I thought perhaps the motion might be a little more specific about what Hon Simon O'Brien is actually moving. Then I sat and listened to the debate on this motion in this chamber and I heard it descend and deteriorate into a blatant attack on the RSPCA. If Hon Simon O'Brien wanted to blatantly attack the RSPCA and that was the point of his motion, perhaps the RSPCA might have been included in his motion. I think it is very unfortunate that the debate descended to the level that it has. I note that in his contribution the minister had prepared notes that directly referred to the RSPCA. I think a stitch-up job has been done on the RSPCA with this motion. If members want to vehemently attack the RSPCA, they should just come out and say it.

I stand in this place today to defend the RSPCA. The RSPCA is a much needed, magnificent organisation that does a lot of good work in the Western Australian community. Animal cruelty is animal cruelty; it is as simple as that! The RSPCA is charged with the role of preventing animal cruelty, charging those who have committed acts of animal cruelty, and caring for animals that have been cruelly treated and neglected. That is its role. I have been to the RSPCA headquarters at Malaga and seen the magnificent work that it does.

**Hon Rick Mazza:** It is not animal cruelty.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Animal cruelty is animal cruelty; it is as simple as that. The RSPCA's charter is overseeing the prevention of cruelty to all animals, and I think it does that job extremely well. Today, I stand to defend the organisation.

**Hon Jim Chown:** Nobody has disputed that.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** That is not what I am hearing, Hon Jim Chown.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order, members.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** There will be time after my contribution for further contributions, and I look forward to those. The RSPCA plays a very important role preventing cruelty to all animals and caring for neglected animals. As I said, I have been to the RSPCA headquarters and understand many of the challenges that it faces. For instance, the RSPCA has dogs in its care that have been there for several years because the court processes delay and delay the prosecution of people who have committed acts of cruelty against them. It is very expensive for the RSPCA to care for the number of dogs that it has. We saw one example in which the RSPCA was charged with caring at its own expense for 40 or 50 dogs that one owner had neglected. The RSPCA has to raise much more funds than is provided to it by government. Most of the RSPCA's fundraising is done through its own devices, such as the Million Paws Walk and other activities.

In my electorate the work of the RSPCA is highly valued. The prevention of cruelty to dogs, cats, birds and right through to commercial animals is valued. I know instances in which people have been subjected to some level of bureaucracy and differences of opinion about what cruelty to animals means. I can cite cases that I will not go into today for lack of time, but I know there have been disagreements between animal owners and the RSPCA over the definition of cruelty and I accept that. I accept that what is and is not animal cruelty will always be a grey area for different people. But if animal owners are not cruel to their animals, treat them well and look after them, they have nothing at all to fear from the RSPCA. I think the RSPCA does a wonderful job and it should be supported and not subject to the attacks that we have heard as a consequence of Hon Simon O'Brien's motion. The motion does not mention the RSPCA, but I can tell from members' contributions that that certainly was the intent.

The RSPCA has a role to play in the prevention of animal cruelty in the live export area, which is a very important industry for my electorate and which I strongly support. I think it is possible to have a live export industry that is free from animal cruelty. I hope that continues to work. There has been good work done in this area. For the live export industry to survive we must address animal cruelty to win over the electorate. We have

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the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System program that traces the carriage of the animals all the way along their journey to their destination and has been a major step forward for the live export industry to the point that we cannot keep up with demand. We cannot keep up with the demand for cattle and sheep, because the industry has become accepted in the general community and is working within the parameters of preventing animal cruelty. I think that is a really good thing. It is very important on issues of animals to err on the side of caution. It is not acceptable to treat animals inhumanely and cruelly in 2014. Not abiding by community expectations is a threat to the live export industry, which is a very, very important industry to agriculture in Western Australia and businesses in my electorate. I will leave the attack on the RSPCA for now, but I am putting on the record that I am very much in the RSPCA's camp.

*Point of Order*

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I am not toying about, raising point of orders, but this is completely irrelevant. This is not a debate about animal cruelty; it is about whether officers are being applied in the right way to liaise with organisations. It has nothing to do with the organisations or what they do; it is about whether they are being monitored.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I note the member's point of order. From listening to the debate, I do not know that the member is making a point solely about animal cruelty. I think he is responding to the matters raised by other contributors to the debate. However, I draw the member's attention to the fact that the motion is about the use of government officers in various community organisations.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Madam Deputy President, I take your point on board. I had just concluded my remarks about animal cruelty and the relevance that the RSPCA has in those situations, given that there had been such criticism of the organisation. I will return to the nub of the motion and throw in a couple of curve balls for Hon Simon O'Brien and members on the other side to consider. I could make an interpretation of this motion. Recently, there has been a lot of talk in the press about the Pelago development in Karratha in which high-rise towers have been built with government money, but no-one is living in them and the units cannot be sold. Significant contributions were made to Finbar —

*Point of Order*

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** This discussion on the Pelago tower has nothing to do with the motion in terms of membership of management committees or boards of community or industry representative organisations. This discussion has absolutely nothing to do with the motion.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order, members! We have a point of order and I need to make a ruling on the point of order. The member made a reference to the Pelago group, but he did not complete that reference, so I do not know whether he is able to draw it into the motion. Perhaps it may have been wiser to hold off on that point of order until a little later so that I could actually understand the point that the member is making. However, I again draw the member's attention to the motion before the Chair and ask that the member address it.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I will continue my remarks on that point because —

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order, members! There will be time after Hon Darren West has completed his comments for other members to contribute to the debate. Hon Darren West has the call.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I will continue my remarks on this because the motion is quite obscure and does not really specify whom we are talking about. I thought that maybe staff from the Department of Regional Development, who I think would qualify under "officers' time", would have had a heavy involvement in the planning, the funding, the costing and, ultimately, the construction of the Pelago towers in Karratha. There certainly has been a heavy investment by the state government in these towers—I suggest a very unwise and questionable investment. In my mind, there is no doubt that there would have been representation on organising committees, boards and industry representative organisations—for example, the Finbar group—and that officers from the Department of Regional Development would have attended external meetings about the planning of this project. That is a good example of what Hon Simon O'Brien may well mean in his motion, if it is not attacking the RSPCA. Government officers' time would certainly have been involved in this. In the Muja AB debacle, government officers' time would have certainly been spent on meetings and industry-based organisations that cost the taxpayers a quarter of a billion dollars. Members opposite might want to read Hon Simon O'Brien's motion and take heed of it, and perhaps do away with some of the atrocious waste of taxpayers' money on



Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Alanna Clohesy; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Jacqui Boydell

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building apartments in the Pilbara that nobody wants to buy, and then renting ones in the adjoining tower, which is again questionable. Members should perhaps take heed of this and keep officers from the Department of Regional Development away from private investors such as the Finbar group.

**HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral)** [12.24 pm]: I was not going to speak on this motion today, but I have been inspired to speak by the response of Hon Darren West. I just have to point out that in true Hon Darren West form, he has brought the debate down to the lowest common denominator by making a political point and trying to bring in a range of issues that have nothing to do with the motion.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order, members! Hon Jacqui Boydell has the call.

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** I will comment on the RSPCA. I have been in the chamber for the whole debate, and there was absolutely no inclination by any of the members who spoke about the RSPCA, or indeed the minister in his response, to suggest that animal cruelty should not be addressed. Of course, it should be addressed. It is ridiculous to say that members of this house believe that animal cruelty should be let go unabated. That is not what was said. The comments of the members who spoke to the motion and the minister's response clarified the governance around taxpayers' money being spent and how that organisation, as an example, is being run. That is what the motion is about. On behalf of taxpayers, members of this government and of this house need to make sure that that money is being spent correctly, that the right standards are being met, and that a process is in place for acquittal of that money so that we can say to taxpayers that this organisation is using taxpayers' money to the best of its ability and that that is a great thing. Of course, we will continue to support the work of an organisation such as the RSPCA. There was absolutely no inference by members of this house, who spoke very coherently on the motion, that the motion was about animal cruelty.

My second point is that if members want to comment, as they are completely entitled to do as members of this house, they should do a bit of research about what they want to comment on on the public record. At the end of the day, if they do not, they are doing themselves a disservice because they do not know what they are talking about.

I thank Hon Simon O'Brien for bringing the motion to the house. It is completely relevant that this house should discuss the governance arrangements around how taxpayers' money is spent. I hope the opposition is not suggesting that the government should not review the governance standards of organisations such as the RSPCA on which taxpayers' money is being spent. In fact, that is the complete opposite of what the government should do. I thank the members who have contributed coherently to the debate and to the minister's response.

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [12.27 pm] — in reply: I thank members for giving me just a moment to respond and to thank them for their thoughtful and helpful contributions, which are very much appreciated. To conclude, in addition to thanking members for their participation, I want to stress that although nothing in the motion alleges extensive or endemic officer time wasting at unnecessary meetings or liaisons, I recognise that that can occur. My point was not that there is anything wrong with having meetings—I thought I made that quite clear—as long as they have a purpose, as so many do. Hon Alanna Clohesy referred to the fact that they often have very good productive purposes. I am concerned that government and government officers, as a feature of the models of government that they are pursuing, run a risk that we are not present at the meetings that we need to be represented at; that was my point. The motion stimulated some discussion. I am glad to see the minister is already well and truly in this space. I also want to reassure the RSPCA of my good intentions towards that venerable organisation, and I wish it well into the future.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.