

WATER CORPORATION — DIVIDENDS

581. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Premier:

I have a supplementary question. Given the massive increase in applications for hardship utility grant scheme grants, I would say that the increases in electricity and water prices are very relevant.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Could you just start with that one again? I could not hear a word.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Premier!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The \$4 billion coming out of the budget over the forward estimates from the Water Corporation is not consistent with the previous forward estimates. It is an increase on the Premier's watch.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Member for Girrawheen, I call you to order for the first time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The Premier has put these increases in place in the name of budget repair. How can he claim budget repair, given that he has increased debt, increased the deficit, and increased net debt?

The SPEAKER: I do not think that was a question, but you can answer it if you want to, Premier.

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

The Treasurer has helpfully informed me that there has been no change to the dividend policy of the Water Corporation from the dividend policy that was there when we were elected. I want to make one other thing plain. The Water Corporation is a natural monopoly. It is owned by the taxpayers of Western Australia, and makes a return to the taxpayers of Western Australia. I think that is a pretty good outcome. It is a natural monopoly, and it makes a return to the people of the state—so it goes to funding schools, hospitals, police and the like. That is what it does, because it provides that return. We know, because we saw it before the last election, that the opposition wants to sell these things. I can sense a train of thought from the member for Scarborough. She is heading in the direction of wanting to sell the Water Corporation, so in the next few years we will see Western Power and the Water Corporation on the chopping block of the Liberals and Nationals. We will be happy to fight those campaigns. We won the last election —

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Don't mislead the house; I never said that.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I can sense what the member is thinking. I have watched her in operation now for the last eight and a half years, and I know what she is thinking before she even asks it. This is another example of that. We are not selling the Water Corporation. We are retaining the forward estimates that the former government had. We are retaining the same dividend policy. The opposition should improve its questions.

The SPEAKER: That is the end of question time.