

MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT — QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Statement

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Transport) [10.02 pm]: Mr President, I will take the opportunity to respond briefly to Hon Ken Travers. I apologise for having to delay the house but on the matter he has just raised and the manner in which he has raised it, obviously, I have no choice but to give a brief response.

The first of the suggestions by Hon Ken Travers, which I have not heard made by anybody else in this town apart from him and a few of his colleagues, is that I am not across my portfolio. He says that specifically I am not across my portfolio because I cannot answer a question that he has derived from a report—so we are told; he has not produced it to me—in some provincial newspaper reporting about some local issue. To suggest that I should have all of that information at my immediate fingertips and recall and have researched it at all times is absolutely ludicrous. It betrays a fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of the portfolio that he is meant to be shadowing. Perhaps it is typical of why he was overlooked in all the time that the Labor Party was in government. The question in three parts that was put to me yesterday by Hon Ken Travers was —

- (1) Is the minister aware that Dalmarine Pty Ltd has asked the Minister for Regional Development to help obtain approvals and land for new commercial marine facilities at Dampier?

That was the first part of the question.

Hon Ken Travers: A simple answer: yes or no?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: How the dickens am I meant to be able to recall instantly off the top of my head whether I was aware of that? The question asked whether I was aware that a company called Dalmarine had asked another minister at some time—I am not sure when; it might have been last week or last year—about some specific help.

Hon Ken Travers: Ministers across the country are asked questions like that daily.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That was the first part of the question that the member asked. The second part of Hon Ken Travers's question was —

Is the minister aware that the Minister for Regional Development has referred the issue to the Dampier Port Authority, an agency for which he has responsibility —

I presume he means for which I, as the Minister for Transport, have responsibility —

and that the Dampier Port Authority has publicly denied its responsibility to resolve this issue?

They are the words of Hon Ken Travers; they are not mine, and I do not know whether they are the words of the newspaper. The third question he asked was —

Which minister is responsible for resolving Dalmarine's land tenure and approvals requirements?

I think that my response on the day, not unreasonably, was along the lines that the honourable member had asked a question involving complex matters that clearly would require some research on my part to make sure that I was giving him accurate information. It is actually about a relatively straightforward, frequent and non-earth-shaking event in a ministerial office. Ministers often get inquiries on behalf of companies or other entities in one commercial name or another by which the same entity might be known. They come in in large numbers; we deal with them all the time. It is prudent, when addressing the house, to make sure that we have the facts about what actually happened. This is not the most earth-shattering inquiry by the member.

Hon Ken Travers: Are you aware of the lack of facilities at the Dampier port?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Yes, I am well aware of that.

Hon Ken Travers: What are you doing about it?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: If the member wants to ask me about that, he is free to ask me. However, that is not what he asked me. One of the first things that I would reasonably be expected to do is to examine the veracity of what he suggested in the question and how he has phrased it. The member said that the Dampier Port Authority had publicly denied its responsibilities in the matter. I do not know anything about the Dampier Port Authority allegedly denying its responsibilities in this or any other matter. It is reasonable to say that I would respond to the member's question, but how can I be expected to be intimately aware of this issue in the exact terms that Hon Ken Travers has presented it?

For the record, the facts are, firstly, that the Minister for Regional Development did in fact request my assistance in framing a response to the request he received from Dalmarine Pty Ltd. Members should bear in mind that the

minister is my ministerial colleague and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport. Secondly, I can tell members that in my advice to the Minister for Regional Development, I suggested that Dalmarine Pty Ltd should contact the Dampier Port Authority to deal with the issue. I am advised that the Dampier Port Authority has not publicly denied its responsibility to resolve this issue for Dalmarine Pty Ltd. That addresses an incorrect assertion in the member's question. To the contrary, the Dampier Port Authority, which is in the business of facilitating trade, met with Dalmarine Pty Ltd to discuss its requirements, as I would expect it to do.

The remaining lot of suitable waterfront land under the control of the Dampier Port Authority was not acceptable to Dalmarine Pty Ltd due to the considerable cost of development. As I say, the shortage of port authority land in Dampier is an ongoing issue, and it is a debate for another day. The honourable member would portray his question about which minister is responsible for resolving Dalmarine's land tenure and approval requirements as a very simple question, but it is not. The area that Dalmarine Pty Ltd identified to the Dampier Port Authority is an area of interest in Hampton Harbour. It is the current Kaiser marina facility in Hampton Harbour, which is outside the control of the Dampier Port Authority. So much for it being my issue!

The land area is currently crown land. Members might think that the Minister for Regional Development and for Lands comes into it, but it is controlled by Rio Tinto under its state agreement. Dalmarine Pty Ltd was advised that if it wished to negotiate access to the area, it would need to approach Rio Tinto in the first instance. Of course, in that eventuality, the responsible minister for resolving the land tenure and approvals requirements question—if it were to be unsuccessful in negotiating with Rio Tinto—would be the Minister for State Development. It is not a simple matter at all. It is a matter that requires some checking of records. It is a matter that ensured it was provided with assistance. It is a matter that involved ensuring that Dampier, despite what Hon Ken Travers said, did not publicly deny its responsibility. It was also a matter upon which the facts show that the honourable member was completely wrong in the assertions contained within his question. I am pleased to be able to set that right.

There is an irony about the Esperance Port Authority matter. I mentioned, in answer to the question, that the positions Hon Ken Travers was asking about were in transition as we spoke; even to the extent that we were finalising the announcement of the CEO position, literally, as the honourable member asked the question. I choose not to announce these things by question without notice.

The final matter I wanted to do was to be in contact with the acting chairman of the port, Tim Shanahan, to ensure that he was happy about the timing of the announcement. Sometimes with these personnel matters, there are outstanding issues that the responsible authority has to deal with—perhaps in relation to unsuccessful candidates and so on. I do not recall the exact date that some file or other hit my desk, but it has been dealt with —

Hon Ken Travers: The minister has all the other details but that one he forgot to bring into the house tonight! I reckon it was last year, wasn't it?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: No, it was not. It went through cabinet a couple of weeks ago. I promptly wrote to advise the port authority of that. As I say, the only outstanding issue is the one I have just described. I know what I am talking about in my portfolio. I am certainly not scared to receive questions from the honourable member.

House adjourned at 10.12 pm
