

LOT 556, COTTESLOE — COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT — BUSHLAND

Grievance

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [9.35 am]: I thank the Minister for Lands for taking my grievance about the potential sale for commercial development of lot 556 in Cottesloe, which was previously lots 225 and 346 on Curtin Avenue. People may know the area. It includes the McCall Centre, which is known locally as the Old Cable Station, and the surrounding land. I fully support the preservation and redevelopment of the Old Cable Station, especially if it is used for a purpose that brings people into the area. However, I share the significant local concern about the potential sale and development of the surrounding land, including significant areas of bushland. For some time, the Friends of Mosman Park Bushland, with the support of the Cottesloe Coastcare Association and both the Mosman Park and Cottesloe ratepayers associations—people who are probably more likely to support the minister’s side of politics than mine, not that I am saying how they will vote—have advocated setting aside the land around the centre to comprise the critical final link in the proposed Vlamingh Parklands ecological link between the river and the sea. The so-named Vlamingh Parklands is a unique green link between the Indian Ocean at Mosman Beach to Milo Beach on the Swan River, including Garungup Park, Minim Cove and Chidley Point Bush Forever sites. The bush provides a critical habitat for rare and endangered plants and various animals. Of special interest is the thriving colony of quenda at Minim Cove, the white-browed scrubwren and, especially, the locally rare variegated fairy-wren. Eighteen bird species use the bushland and associated water bodies, including forest red-tailed black cockatoos and Carnaby’s black cockatoos.

The rainbow bee-eater is another important migratory bird that uses this area. Habitat for this bird is progressively under threat in the metropolitan area, reinforcing the need to preserve the Vlamingh Parklands. This track of bush is unique in the metropolitan area because it provides an essentially unbroken link for plants and animals from the river to the sea, recognising that Stirling Highway and the railway line intersect the route. Many environmentally aware members in this place would know that small animals require nearly continuous bush coverage to migrate between areas. The bush provides important cover from predators, especially predatory birds, cats and foxes. The bush near the Old Cable Station is adjacent to Vlamingh Memorial, reputedly the place where Europeans first landed in the Perth area in 1697. The area is rich in Aboriginal heritage and has great significance to local Aboriginal families. The seven limestone hills in the area were recognised as the Seven Sisters. The site also adjoins the heritage-listed Aboriginal camp site at Minim Cove. This site has been ascertained to have been occupied for over 10 000 years based on carbon dating of Aboriginal artefacts found there. The bushland links this site to the limestone cliffs and caves at Cable Beach, known as the Moondarup Rocks, which has ceremonial significance to local Aboriginal people. The adjacent beach and reef area were important seasonal fishing grounds for Aboriginal families.

The Vlamingh Parklands comprise a mixture of remnant bushland, some introduced plants, mostly Victorian tea-trees planted to stabilise soil, and restored bushland. The area around the Old Cable Station is dominated by the introduced Victorian tea-trees. Although not indigenous to the area, the resulting densely packed understorey provides an ideal breeding and feeding ground for small birds; in particular, the white-browed scrubwren and variegated fairy-wrens. The volunteers from the Friends of Mosman Park Bushland, in conjunction with the Town of Mosman Park, have done an absolutely outstanding job progressively restoring and replanting the bushland with endemic native plants. While some of the area proposed for the Vlamingh park bushland currently does not comprise original flora, there is every reason to believe that the area can be fully restored to reflect the original diversity of plant species. If the whole area is sold for commercial development, the opportunity to create this unique connection between the ocean and the river will be lost forever, with a significant impact on the survival and expansion of native flora and fauna in the area. It will also be a lost opportunity to create a local and regional tourist attraction, with a walk trail through the area enabling people to learn about the significant Aboriginal and European heritage and important environmental values.

I greatly appreciate, given the minister’s role as Treasurer, the focus of the government on prudent financial management, and that all government departments have targets for cost savings and income from asset sales. However, I believe that any benefits from income from the sale of the whole of this land will be outweighed by compromising the opportunity for an enhanced tourist attraction and preserving important Aboriginal heritage and environmental values. In previous correspondence, the previous minister indicated that the government is committed to the sale of this land. However, I strongly urge the minister to reconsider the sale of all of this piece of land. Instead, I respectfully suggest that the minister subdivide the Old Cable Station and land necessary for a car park for separate sale and work with the local community to complete the Vlamingh Parklands, preserving and enhancing this unique bushland link between the river and the sea.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park — Minister for Lands) [9.41 am]: I thank the member for his grievance about the cable station and lot 556. I am familiar with this piece of land, having driven past it, but I have not walked the site. I am familiar with its location, but certainly not the detail that the member has outlined. I have noted the comments he has made about the Vlamingh Parklands providing a significant habitat for a range of birds.

By way of background, perhaps ironically, this piece of land—the old Cottesloe cable station—was identified for divestment to reduce debt by the former member for Cottesloe, Colin Barnett, and Terry Redman, the then Minister for Lands, on 24 June 2015. Importantly, the then Premier and the Minister for Lands made the point that it was not just about reducing debt, but also a great opportunity to refresh and revitalise our city and state. Perhaps they were saying that because it was recognised that the location was effectively underutilised, and this was an opportunity to utilise in a much more effective way an important heritage asset. I went back through the media commentary, particularly, unsurprisingly, a fair bit of interest in the *Western Suburbs Weekly*. In the view of the then Premier, the member for Cottesloe, it would be ideal for the former cable station at the McCall Centre to become a restaurant and function centre or even a home. On 30 September 2016, he said that he expected the sale to take place in about a year, but he wanted to see public use of the centre for purposes such as wedding receptions, or as aged and retirement facilities.

For various reasons, the processes through the metropolitan region scheme have not been proceeded with, despite the intention of the former government and this government to continue with a sale process. A previous MRS amendment for lot 556 Curtin Avenue was refused by the Western Australia Planning Commission, as the proposal needed to further consider coastal setback and traffic requirements, as well as the potential future development footprint of the site, if any. Clearly, the issue that the member raised has been considered by the WAPC. I am interested in the member's comments about the Aboriginal connection to that area. The seven sisters is a very well-established story that we come across all the way through the central desert and up into Queensland. If an actual site is registered—I suspect that it is—it would mean that any requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act would have to be complied with. As consecutive governments have now identified, the McCall Centre is underutilised. It is currently vacant and I suspect, therefore, that it is a target for vandalism, which is inevitably the case with unoccupied locations in the metropolitan area. I think there is an opportunity to activate that heritage asset. It is important to note that it is a heritage asset.

Dr D.J. Honey: May I make a very quick interjection, minister? I think everyone supports redeveloping that area, and using it for a restaurant or other purposes, and car parking. It is just the rest of the land around it that has the bush on it, that people are concerned about.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I understand that concern, and I suspect that in any proposals that might come forward for that site there would be a keen desire to ensure that that public-use area is maintained. According to some of the notes that have been provided to me, although this area has been identified for potential sale, it is subject to rezoning under the metropolitan region scheme and the local planning scheme for future urban use. That proposed rezoning will determine the appropriate future use of the land, considering matters such as environmental values and the preservation of state and Aboriginal heritage values. I suspect that the process itself will identify that. Ultimately, I will wait for that outcome. I am not yet in a position to make a comment on whether subdivision is appropriate. The process will give us some better indications about that, but clearly this area has significant history. The old cable station is a heritage site, as the Minister for Heritage, nodding sagely at me, has confirmed, so that in itself I suspect would limit what can actually happen at the location, bearing in mind that the heritage site must be protected. Similarly, the environmental values of that bushland for the local birdlife in particular is identified by the member. I am interested in the Aboriginal heritage site. Perhaps I should pay more attention to that location. I said that I have driven past it, and I know it, but I have not walked it and I am not familiar with it specifically, but the story of the seven sisters is a well-established Aboriginal story, not just in metropolitan Perth but across Australia.

I thank the member for the grievance. He has raised some good issues. I think that the process can accommodate those, but in respect of the specific proposal for subdivision, let us see what the MRS proposal throws up, and we will look at it again when that is complete.