

PREMIER'S STATEMENT

Consideration

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [3.00 pm]: In addressing the Premier's Statement, I plan to focus on forced local government amalgamations. Following the Minister for Local Government's response to my question in question time, it appears as though every local government in the state is operating under a false assumption. Every single local government in the state, all 139 of them, all those in the National Party electorates, all those small country local governments that are desperately afraid of having their councils forcefully amalgamated, are apparently operating under a false assumption.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, settle down! No private meetings in the chamber.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Apparently they all got it wrong. I went to the south west of the state and visited six local governments the week after the minister made the unprecedented announcement in Exmouth on 5 February. In answer to local government representatives' and local government chief executive officers' questions from the floor, when the minister was asked what would happen if local governments decided that they did not want to amalgamate, he said, "I will make you do it." Those are not the exact words, but I can give the exact words. I can quote to the minister from the Western Australian Local Government Association media release of the same day by that well-known Labor supporter Bill Mitchell. It is entitled "Election Promise to be Abandoned on Council Amalgamations" and reads —

The State Government today promised it would break an election promise on no forced amalgamations of Local Governments if Councils failed to "voluntarily" —

"Voluntarily" is the word that the minister has used ever since, but failed to use on that day in reality —

put forward plans to merge in six months.

I have here a quote of what the Minister for Local Government said. Mr Mitchell was in attendance at the time of the announcement and recorded what was said. What the minister said was distributed to every single local government in the state. That has created an incredible amount of anxiety and uncertainty in the local government sector across this state. That is the minister's fault and he is backing down from it now. He is trying to pretend it never happened. Local councils around the state are spending time, money and effort right now on preparing amalgamation plans that the minister has demanded under threat of forced amalgamations. The minister should not try to back down from it. I have got what was said, and I quote —

... in Exmouth today, Local Government Minister John Castrilli said: "If Councils do not amalgamate there will be legislation".

When asked by Elected Members to clarify his position on forced amalgamations he told the meeting: "If you don't want to do it, I'll do it, as simple as that."

That was the minister's "voluntary" amalgamation proposal that he is trying to sell to us today. Bill Mitchell was not the only person who reported it. The day after, as the minister well knows, it was reported on the front page of *The West Australian*, because it was such a momentous moment in the local government sector and such a dramatic departure from the pre-election stance that it had to be reported. Journalist Daniel Hatch reported it in these terms —

Local Government Minister John Castrilli has given councils and the WA Local Government Association until August to draw up an "optimal plan" for voluntary mergers or he will legislate to reform local government, including forced amalgamations.

To be sure that I was not verballing Mr Hatch or the minister, I rang Mr Hatch and asked him whether the minister had actually said those words to him. Does the minister know what he said? He said that yes, the minister did. In fact, he repeated the words that the minister said to the people in the audience in Exmouth. Mr Hatch was not the only one.

On 12 February, a little time later, when the minister had time to think about it and recognise that perhaps he had overstepped the mark and had made a major error, or maybe the Leader of the National Party whispered to him and suggested that it perhaps be toned down a bit, the minister said to Paige Taylor, a journalist for *The Australian* —

"At the end of the day, I want reductions in numbers and if they come back and say 'We're not interested in this', then I will legislate," ...

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Thursday, 12 March 2009]

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Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Frank Alban; Mr John Castrilli; Speaker; Mr Martin Whitley; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Joe Francis

The minister knows that he has said it more than once. The minister knows what he has done: he has taken a collaborative, consultative process that was well underway, that had been going for four years in the form of the systemic sustainability study —

Mr G.M. Castrilli: What did the previous government do in eight years?

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: What is the Leader of the Nationals' view on forced amalgamations?

Mr B.J. Grylls: The minister has given that process a kick-start. I am looking forward to councils coming back at the end of August and putting forward their plans for reform. In fact, they are now writing to me congratulating the government for taking a lead on this reform process. That is a good outcome.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is very interesting. I have got a letter here that arrived today in response to a letter that was sent out to clarify the opposition's position. At the time there was a vacuum of information from the minister, so we provided a little bit of information on our position. As I said, the week after, coincidentally, I just happened to be going to the south west to consult with six local governments. I can tell the minister that there were not too many councils jumping up in support of this proposal. This letter from the Mayor of South Perth arrived today in response to our letter. I will read the telling last paragraph —

The lack of consultation by the Minister, despite his support for WALGA's Systemic Sustainability Study and the cost of this exercise during the global financial crisis difficulties, adds further and unnecessary complexity.

In addition, the mayor indicated prior to that that the City of South Perth—as are all local governments in the state, including those in the minister's electorate that have come to see me about their proposals—is not in favour of forced amalgamations, and the minister knows that. They are in favour of moves towards achieving sustainability and they have got some excellent ideas. I was thankful that they came and presented those ideas to me —

Mr B.J. Grylls: Was that the South East Avon Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes. It is very impressive. This seems like a positive way ahead. However, the Leader of the National Party also understands the negative impact that the minister has had. By making that threat, what he has done —

Mr B.J. Grylls: He has not had a negative impact on SEAVROC. SEAVROC in fact came to see the minister to say, "Can we get the legislation changed?"

Mr P. PAPALIA: He has had a negative impact on reform of the local government sector. Exactly what Bill Mitchell predicted would happen has happened in the local government sector in the month or so since he made that statement —

"What this announcement has done is damage all work towards regional cooperation by Local Governments who will now be focused only on ensuring their own survival in an amalgamation process."

The Leader of the National Party knows that is a fact.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Is that what SEAVROC is doing?

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is not what it is doing.

Mr B.J. Grylls: No; exactly!

Mr P. PAPALIA: It was not doing it before. I will tell the minister what it is doing. It is spending time, money and effort on providing a proposal for an amalgamation for the minister. That is going on all around the state in councils such as the City of Stirling which has 186 000 ratepayers. SEAVROC is proposing an amalgamation because it has to. It took a month but finally the Department of Local Government and Regional Development came up with guidelines after the minister pulled the pin on his grenade and threw it into the process. Let me tell the minister that the most unfortunate state for a grenade is not to have its pin in! That is what the people received from him on 5 April. What happened? The minister threw the entire process into disarray. People around the state are spending time, money and effort, regardless of whether they fulfil the guidelines. Those guidelines do not —

Mr G.M. Castrilli: You will all be very interested to see, at the end of August —

Mr P. PAPALIA: Can I seek the protection of the Deputy Speaker? I seek the Deputy Speaker's protection from the minister.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Warnbro has the call.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The minister has used a big club to frighten people. There are two alternative reasons for that having happened. The first is that he was just overstepping the mark and doing what his chief of staff told him. He was like the mannequin and the chief of staff was the ventriloquist, and he was saying exactly what his chief of staff has been saying for years. The alternative is that he just saw this as a cynical tactic to get movement on something that the leader of the Nationals thinks is a great idea. I happen to think there is good reason for getting movement in a reform process in local government, but I would have used the \$400 million country local government fund to initiate some moves in a positive way—use that big carrot—instead of throwing \$100 million at local governments over the next four months without any discernible benefit to the ratepayers of this state.

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It raises the question that if the local government sector is so dysfunctional and so unsustainable, why is the minister giving the 108 local governments in the country regions \$100 million, with no strings attached, over the next four months? Why is the minister doing that? How can he possibly justify that? That is a rhetorical question because I know he cannot justify it.

Mr T.G. Stephens: He can't justify it and he will never be able to justify why he did that.

Mr P. PAPALIA: What the minister has done is farcical. He is either incompetent or totally lacking in compassion for the people of Western Australia in a global financial crisis and there is so much anxiety and uncertainty right across the state, regardless of his activities. He has stepped into the fray and frightened the 11 000 local government employees around the state; they do not know whether their jobs are secure. The hundreds of volunteers who are out there doing good work as elected members of local governments do not even know whether they should bother in October. They do not even know whether they will exist because this process will not be over in October. The minister has totally destroyed any collaboration or consultation and not given them any guidance. His guidelines do not give guidance and they do not give any indication of where he is going with this. They are useless.

We can go through the guidelines checklist. Finally, after a month, the minister has reverted to some sort of analysis of whether local governments are sustainable under the guidelines. If local governments go through the checklist, they will find it frightening—it is Orwellian. When they get to the bottom and find they have ticked all the boxes, it will be, “Yes, we're sustainable—woo hoo!” This is an example of a frequently asked question: If you are sustainable, should you still consider amalgamation? Answer: yes. Okay, no choice there. Is that voluntary!

One of the arguments that the minister has included in his guidelines for going on to consider amalgamation is better governance outcomes and better support, services and efficiencies for the ratepayers and taxpayers of Western Australia. That is what they should then go on to consider—even if they are sustainable—says the minister. According to my notes, another frequently asked question is: If we go on to consider whether or not there are benefits to be had in any of those areas for forcing amalgamation on ourselves, do we still have to consider it and provide a submission to you? Answer: yes. Minister, that is not a voluntary process—that is not even a process! That is a dictatorial style that has completely destroyed the local government reform process.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The time line is irrational. Dozens of people have approached me and suggested that after years of work they had finally got to the stage of bringing people with them to achieve change—without dictating it to them—so that they had some ownership. If members know anything about change management, they will know that if we take people along with us, we can achieve change. We cannot have change that has been dictated and expect it to be sustainable in the long term. The minister knows that.

The problem is that the minister has been caught out. The Premier had to step in and tell him to withdraw his threat, which is what he has done today.

Mr C.J. Barnett: That is untrue! That is totally untrue. That is misleading Parliament.

Mr P. PAPALIA: What the Premier should do is tell the minister to apologise to the local governments of Western Australia—

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: In his statement the Premier talks of voluntary amalgamation. The minister talks of forced amalgamation! The Premier was not in this place when I was quoting from the speech that the minister gave and

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the subsequent questions from the floor in Exmouth on 5 February. Does the Premier want me to read them to him? Would the Premier like me to read what the minister said on 5 February?

Mr C.J. Barnett: It is incorrect. I don't care what he said —

Mr P. PAPALIA: It does not matter what he said on 5 February?

Mr C.J. Barnett: You have just misled Parliament.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Okay, Premier, I will read it out because I am apparently misleading —

Mr M. McGowan: Listen carefully, Premier!

Mr P. PAPALIA: This was on 5 February, as reported by the president of the Western Australian Local Government Association, and I will read it into *Hansard* again in response to the Premier, who was not in this place when I read it earlier. It states —

... in Exmouth today, Local Government Minister John Castrilli said: "If Councils do not amalgamate there will be legislation".

When asked by Elected Members to clarify his position on forced amalgamations he told the meeting: "If you don't want to do it, I'll do it, simple as that."

Come on, Leader of the Nationals! I know he is trying to achieve some solidarity with the government, but let us face it: he knows that was an unbridled, unrestricted threat to the local governments of Western Australia. It was either done because he is inept or because he saw it as a callous way of inducing faster action in that reform process. I think some of his \$400 million country local government fund—sorry, it is his! It is his because he controls—well, no, the Leader of the Nationals controls it, but the minister has the responsibility for it. I think some of that should have been used to entice change rather than threaten change.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: If I am wrong, why, on 7 April, is the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, CEDA, having a breakfast at which the minister is one of the keynote speakers? The committee sends out invitations, and I might even go along. Does the minister think he will still attend if I come along and ask questions from the floor? CEDA sent out an overview, and the first paragraph of the overview states —

In February, the Local Government Minister John Castrilli gave the 139 councils across WA six months to consider amalgamation or face the prospect of being forced to do so under new State laws.

"Being forced to do so under new state laws"—where did it get that from? It did not happen! The Premier said it did not happen. The minister said it did not happen. Everybody else in the state in the local government sector thinks it happened! Why does the leader of the Nationals think it did not happen?

Mr B.J. Grylls: Are you aware that the Leader of the Opposition put out a press release supporting the way that we have allocated the country local government fund to encourage councils to work together at a regional level?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Why does the Minister for Regional Development not think that threat was made?

Mr B.J. Grylls: I just know that I am getting letters from local government stating that they appreciate the ability to start the process.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I think we will push on because I can see the Minister for Regional Development is being a bit mealy-mouthed.

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I have noticed the change since he moved from over there.

Several members interjected.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P. PAPALIA: The leader of the Nationals is mealy-mouthed. He reminds me a lot of the education minister, because the lioness, in opposition for the Independents, used to stand over there and trumpet her credentials as having integrity and having the solutions to all problems. I concede that when in opposition we always have the solution and the government has never got it right. I have only been here five minutes but I know that already. The transformation of the education minister into the tiny little mouse that sits on that side —

Mr C.J. Barnett: What did you say?

Mr P. PAPALIA: From the lioness to the mouse! It is an analogy. Does the Premier get it?

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Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Frank Alban; Mr John Castrilli; Speaker; Mr Martin Whitley; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Joe Francis

Mr C.J. Barnett: Well, that's a very appropriate comment, isn't it—"a tiny little mouse that sits over there"? I hope Hansard got your reference to a tiny little mouse that sits over there.

Mr P. PAPALIA: She is so difficult to hear over here that I think I am going to request that the chamber staff get an extension lead for her microphone because it is honestly very difficult to hear her.

The Leader of the National Party is the same. He has gone from being Mr Integrity and the shining Superman when in opposition to the guy who is a little bit too clever with his words and who wants only to deliver the good news all over the state. He is turning the state into a modern-day cargo cult. He is flying across the state in the government jet. What is it about this whole process? He is turning the regions into having a cargo-cult mentality but there seems to be a problem because the government jet is stuck over the wheatbelt. It is in a holding pattern! The lion's share of the cargo is dropping out of the aircraft over the wheatbelt. It is not going to the regions that actually produce the royalties. It is disproportionately going to the National Party's electorates.

I will give my colleagues an opportunity to speak to an amendment I will move. The behaviour of the Minister for Local Government today has been appalling. He should stand on the front steps of Parliament and apologise to the local government sector. He should ring Bill Mitchell and get him to send an email to every zone council and tell them that the amalgamation process is off. The minister should say that he realised that he had made a mistake and apologise and commit to return to the consultative, collaborative process that we had all engaged in under the systemic sustainability study process.

Amendment to Question

Mr P. PAPALIA: He should also tell local governments that the threat of forced amalgamations has been withdrawn. Therefore, I move —

That the following words be added after "noted" —

and that the house condemns the Minister for Local Government for his threats to force local government amalgamations in Western Australia.

MR V. CATANIA (North West) [3.21 pm]: I rise to support the amendment moved by the member for Warnbro. I am glad to see the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Regional Development in the chamber to listen to this debate. This is another broken commitment by the government. The Liberal Party and National Party made promises when they were in opposition but we have seen the stock squad disappear and now the police station in my electorate has gone, which the then opposition promised it would reopen. A police station is desperately needed in Gascoyne Junction.

In opposition, the Liberal and National Parties promised to campaign against the nomination to have Ningaloo Reef placed on the World Heritage List but upon forming government they have in fact nominated it for World Heritage listing. The Minister for Local Government stated that Western Australia has 85 local councils with a population of less than 2 000 and with a ratio of electors to each member of less than one to 100. Almost all of those councils are country councils. The councils affected in my electorate are Shark Bay, Murchison, Yalgoo, Mount Magnet, Kew, Meekatharra, Upper Gascoyne and Exmouth. They each have a population of less than 2 000. This is a consistent flip-flop government. I am glad that the Minister for Regional Development is here. Will he promise to not support any amalgamations in the Murchison area involving the towns that I have just mentioned? I know that he is busy with some parliamentary business but I look forward to his reply to that question. Yet again we are seeing the National Party giving \$1 to regional Western Australia and taking away \$20. That is a consistent pattern. Local governments have been given money through the royalties for regions scheme but must now spend it to justify their existence.

The announcement to reform local government has already created a lot of uncertainty for local government employees and elected members. Local government elections are being held in October. There is already some talk about reducing the number of councillors in the Shire of Roebourne. That will have an effect on the outlying towns because they do not have the necessary population to fight to retain their elected officials. The amalgamation will have a dramatic effect on the ability of elected members to represent their constituents. More importantly, the financial implications that this will have on local governments across Western Australia are huge. They have not had a chance to put in their budget the costs associated with this exercise of justifying their existence. They will have to prepare detailed costings, provide maps and make use of technical expertise for legal matters, and the list goes on. Local governments are not prepared for it. Can the Minister for Local Government assure local governments across Western Australia that they will be reimbursed for the costs associated with the preparation of the reform submissions? I look forward to receiving his reply. Will the minister reimburse the shires for what they spend? The Minister for Local Government's announcement has caused considerable angst among local governments and their employees. The time frame specified has caused considerable pressure —

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Mr V. CATANIA: How is that? Will the Minister for Regional Development pay attention? Will he confirm that he will not force any amalgamations in the Murchison district and the Gascoyne?

Mr B.J. Grylls: Correct.

Mr V. CATANIA: Good.

Mr T.G. Stephens: He might stand by while others do it.

Mr V. CATANIA: He is throwing out the government line.

We are experiencing the global financial crisis, about which the state government has done absolutely nothing. It has provided no assistance to create jobs and assist those who have lost their jobs. The government has done nothing whatsoever. The Minister for Regional Development is bragging that he is a regional heavyweight and that he will deliver for regional WA. The government will force local government amalgamations and lose jobs in regional WA. What hypocrisy!

Mr P. Papalia: It is short-sighted.

Mr V. CATANIA: It is very short-sighted. The National Party is delivering \$1 to regional WA but at the same time is costing jobs. At what cost will the royalties for regions scheme be implemented? We are seeing three per cent cuts being made to very important government departments right across regional WA.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Where would you have implemented the three per cent cuts?

Mr V. CATANIA: Not in regional WA because it is already stretched. We are seeing the shires in the North West electorate being targeted to be forced into amalgamations. We will see jobs go at the worst possible time. This is the worst possible time for the government to look at forcing local government amalgamations because jobs in regional Western Australia are very important, even during the best of times. This is a very important time when the government should be promoting jobs so that the towns can survive. Local governments are the backbone and the heart of the towns, particularly in my electorate. As I said, shires such as Murchison right up to Meekatharra are very important.

As I said, the Minister for Regional Development has given regional WA \$1. We should call him the minister for trinkets. He will give the regions a coat of paint but take away the police stations, courthouses, power stations, high schools and primary schools. That is what is happening in the North West electorate. We are seeing major infrastructure projects disappear, and for what? For the cost of some paint. That is what they are getting at the moment. We are now seeing three per cent cuts being made to regional WA government departments, which are so very important. They are already stretched. Now we are seeing jobs in regional WA being targeted.

This government is doing nothing to save jobs in regional Western Australia.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Are you aware that this will be recorded in *Hansard*? Are you aware that people will be reading this stuff?

Mr V. CATANIA: I am glad about that, because the minister should be embarrassed about his comments today.

I look forward to the minister's support for regional Western Australia by ensuring that the three per cent cuts do not affect front-line services in regional Western Australia. I support the amendment. I hope the Minister for Local Government will respond and ensure that local governments are reimbursed for the time and money they are having to spend, and for the heartache they are being caused, because of the minister's flip-flop policy of forced amalgamations.

MR T.G. STEPHENS (Pilbara) [3.30 pm]: There are some very good questions that the Minister for Local Government needs to answer in this house. The minister has done the easy work of going around and stirring up an issue. He has done that very well. However, instead of doing that, he should have participated in the hard work that could have been done by this government to put in place much needed structural reform in local government. He should have tackled the fundamental work that needs to be done to address the problems with the Local Government Grants Commission processes. Had the minister done that work he would have been able to get on top of his brief and recognise that within the Local Government Grants Commission processes there is an inbuilt reward for inefficiency, and that that is preventing structural reform in local government in this state.

Mr B.J. Grylls: What changes did you make when you were the minister responsible?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I worked very hard on it. I started the process. Does the minister know what was needed to round it off? What was needed was the opportunity to deliver to regional Western Australia incentive programs to assist local governments to implement structural reform. A much-vaunted large amount of money is

now about to land in regional Western Australia. However, there are no incentives or carrots attached to that money to encourage local governments to implement structural reform.

Mr B.J. Grylls: You are not misleading the Parliament, are you?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The Minister for Regional Development has not built into the funding for local governments any requirement that they participate in structural reform. The minister has not made structural reform the number one priority for local governments. The minister has not put in place a funding program that will reward local governments and their communities for their participation, collaboration and cooperation in delivering programs in an efficient way across regional Western Australia.

Mr P. Papalia: Mr Stephens, I suspect that you were probably, as a minister, hampered by opposition from some people in the western suburbs in Perth. In fact, I think there was collaboration between three members of Parliament, led by the now Premier, to oppose reform in local government.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That was part of the problem, yes. The main problem that I had was that the only way the formula for the Local Government Grants Commission could be changed was through collaboration between state and federal ministers. At the time, the minister responsible was a coalition minister, and he declined the pressure that I put on him to get the formula changed. What steps have been taken by the Minister for Local Government, along with the federal minister and his colleagues around the nation, to get the Local Government Grants Commission formula changed? A lot of hard work needs to be done to convince the federal minister with responsibility for the Local Government Grants Commission to put in place a process that does not reward inefficiencies. Programs need to be put in place to encourage structural reform, collaboration and cooperation in local government, and to encourage the sharing of resources, chief executive officers, planning processes, information technology systems and human resources programs. That would be of great benefit to regional communities across this state. Instead of engaging in that structural reform, all the Minister for Local Government has been able to come up with is an absurd proposition for local government amalgamations. That proposition is causing local governments to shake in their boots. The minister thought he would get away with it. Local governments have already recognised that National Party members are just tame lap poodles for this minority Liberal government—tickle their tummies and they will roll over! Regional communities are fearful that local government reform will become a reality, because they recognise that the National Party is not worth two pinches!

Mr B.J. Grylls: Do you want me to quote Chris Adams?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I will tell the minister what local councils have achieved through collaboration between the National Party and the Liberal Party in areas such as my electorate. Six months ago, the *North West Telegraph* ran a brilliant front-page story. It was accompanied by a map and a beautiful \$22 million plan for revitalising the South Hedland central business district.

Mr V. Catania: Was that not under the former Labor government?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Yes. That was under Alannah MacTiernan, the former Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. She rolled out that \$22 million commitment before the election, and it was put in the forward estimates for all to see. However, what happened last week? We had all this hoopla and razzamatazz roll into town! The amazing thing about all this hoopla and razzamatazz is that it comes with its own colour scheme! The National party green and yellow colour scheme has been embedded into the royalties for regions program, top and bottom —

Mr P. Papalia: Member, does the government object to that green and yellow tag?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I do not know. The resources of government are being allocated to the National Party colours, to re-badge a program that had been announced by Alannah MacTiernan.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Was it funded in the forward estimates?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Yes, it was in the forward estimates, right across the four years—all the funding commitments of the Labor team. All the National Party did was add an extra \$1 million and say that somehow or other it was part of the royalties for regions scheme. At the same time as the Minister for Regional Development was delivering this trumped-up royalties for regions program—an extra \$1 million for a scheme for South Hedland—programs are being lost across Western Australia, and local governments across Western Australia are facing the threat of forced amalgamations from the Minister for Local Government.

Mr G.M. Castrilli: The threat!

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Mr T.G. STEPHENS: It is a threat. They now have to spend their precious resources on trying to defend themselves from that threat. In the meantime, a showman is in town, under the big tent, giving away caps and T-shirts! The only thing missing is the National Party balloons! This is all being done with taxpayers' money. I imagine the minister will find that colleagues sitting behind him are not too impressed about the utilisation of government resources to flaunt the National Party around the bush—under false pretences—by putting up National Party colours!

Mr B.J. Grylls: You're the one who should be worried about it, and the people behind you!

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The minister is all froth and bubble! He should look at the great programs that we have been able to deliver! In South Hedland, a \$125 million health campus is being rolled out, and, just down the road, the new police station is nearing completion. That is all the legacy of the former Labor government, and the hardworking local Labor member of Parliament, in close partnership with the federal government, to deliver quality programs. The minister is prancing around in National Party colours with nothing but a lot of froth and bubble. He is not doing the hard, substantive work. The Minister for Regional Development should be ashamed to be part of a government that includes this Minister for Local Government. The Minister for Local Government has been running around the bush and belting up regional councils, when he should have been deploying the resources of government to put in place incentives and programs that will encourage local governments to be efficient and effective in the delivery of services to their communities. The Minister for Regional Development has those resources available to him. I recognise that the Minister for Local Government does not have those resources available to him—they have all landed in the Minister for Regional Development's pot!

The Minister for Local Government should have made sure that he used his influence as a member of the senior party in the minority Liberal government to impose some discipline on the party political parade that is going on in regional Western Australia, put some real substance behind it and give the bush extra opportunities.

Mr B.J. Grylls: I can't imagine the pain you are in.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Back pain and neck pain, but there is no bigger pain than the pain of watching insincere and shallow programs coming from the government, taking with one hand and allegedly trying to give with another. The government can fool some of the people some of the time, but it cannot and will not fool all of the people all of the time. In the next four years the government has the potential to be tested mercilessly by the people, when they recognise that the government is not seriously delivering what they need. The Minister for Regional Development is part of a government that is pulling out substantive support programs. We are watching allied health services disappear from regional Western Australia. Psychiatric services, psychological services, speech therapy and all the other vital allied health programs that were full-time positions are being cut. As the government pulls those baseline programs out of regional Western Australia, into town rides the National Party, placing its green colours over the top of whatever programs we were rolling out in an orderly fashion under the previous Labor government as part of our commitment to regional Western Australia. The Minister for Local Government should be ashamed of himself for not bringing the Minister for Regional Development into line, and for not allowing his better judgement on some issues to have some impact.

Mr P. Papalia: He should have asked him.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: He could have at least asked him whether he agreed that local councils should be forced to amalgamate, as he announced. Now 139 councils are running around the place in turmoil. They never knew what we knew about the minister: that he is capable of deception. The latest promise that the minister appears to be making is that he will back down on his previous promises. It is an extraordinary situation.

Mr P. Papalia: Can we rely on the minister to break the promise that he has already broken?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That is an interesting proposition for the people of Western Australia, particularly those local councils out in the bush that would like to do the right thing, if the minister would only do the hard work. There is some hard work to do. The minister needs to get the Minister for Regional Development behind him, supporting the programs with real funds that allow local councils to do sensible things about delivering restructured programs.

Mr P. Papalia: There seems to be a paucity of country Liberals on that side of the house. I would have expected them to be speaking on the subject.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Which country Liberals does the member have in mind?

Mr P. Papalia: Any of them. Where is the Minister for Mental Health?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That is a good point. Whom will he be amalgamated with?

Mr P. Papalia: You would think the member for Geraldton would want to get up and speak.

Extract from Hansard

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Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Frank Alban; Mr John Castrilli; Speaker; Mr Martin Whitley; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Joe Francis

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I would hope so. There are good things that the Minister for Local Government could be doing. First, he should bring on board the Minister for Regional Development with whatever is left of his programs that is not simply tricks with smoke and mirrors. It should be a matter not of simply putting a National Party colour scheme on the policy banners, but of doing the hard work. He should show that he can work at least as hard as the former Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. She worked hard to deliver the programs that were rolled out across regional Western Australia. She did not come prancing around with government resources badged up with Labor Party colours.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: We'd get out a texta and write our own, wouldn't we?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That is right.

I challenge the Minister for Local Government to do some hard work as the first part of this process. He should make a new promise and tell us he will back down on the promise he made earlier, when he promised he would break the other promise. We want to catch up to where he is up to. We invite him to let the house know very quickly that he will do the hard work with the Local Government Grants Commission to make it possible for this third sphere of government to start delivering effective programs across Western Australia.

MR F. ALBAN (Swan Hills) [3.45 pm]: Like you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have been a shire councillor. Before they get too excited, have any members opposite ever been shire councillors?

Several members interjected.

Mr F. ALBAN: There are a few of them. I also used to be a farmer, and I remember that they used to tell farmers to get bigger or get out. Most got bigger, and they are now more efficient. I applaud what the minister has done in making a very brave decision, although it is not a popular one. People such as members opposite will be ranting and raving and trying to score brownie points, but more people will benefit from amalgamations. Have members opposite spoken to the ratepayers? Are they happy? In the midst of a global recession, would they not welcome their rates being cut in half? Have members opposite talked to the ratepayers? I can provide some facts and figures about a good shire council that I was on. This council has \$1 billion worth of assets.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Warnbro will stop shouting, please.

Mr F. ALBAN: This council has \$1 billion worth of assets, and, at a very low depreciation of two per cent, it requires \$20 million a year to maintain its assets.

Mr P. Papalia: Will you take an interjection?

Mr F. ALBAN: When I am ready.

The council is replacing those assets at the rate of \$9 million every year. Every year, without anyone knowing, the assets are deteriorating by \$11 million, and one day the ratepayers will have to finance that. Most members opposite do not know what they are talking about; they think they are going to get some noise out of it. Most, but not all, shires are wasting ratepayers' money. There is a term "efficiency of scale"; in other words, 10 people should not be sent to do a job that one person can do. If Western Australian ratepayers' money can be saved in a global recession, would they not be grateful? Whose jobs is the opposition trying to save—the chief executive officers of these municipalities or the workers? The workers will still be needed when the shires are amalgamated. The opposition is trying to scaremonger. I applaud the minister for a very brave decision. I would expect most of the shires to be privately happy about this. It had to be taken to a conclusion.

Mr P. Papalia: Do you support forcing amalgamations?

Mr F. ALBAN: The minister has said that the amalgamations are voluntary at this stage. I hope that by August most of the councils will have made a decision for their own good. I am not aware of what has happened yet, but I would say it was a very brave decision. Let us see what the councils do. We do not need to save them at this stage. I have spoken to two councils, and both are working on amalgamation where it is possible. They are not all bankrupt and they do not all need amalgamation. It is ludicrous to think that there are 139 councils, when the state could possibly be run with half that number. We have to focus on what the decision is about. It is about the ratepayers—saving their money and getting them value for dollars—not about scoring brownie points.

MR G.M. CASTRILLI (Bunbury — Minister for Local Government) [3.49 pm]: I have been working very hard on this. I was a local government practitioner for 14 years, and I know, as you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that we have been singing the same song and dancing around the same mulberry bush for the past 20 years, to my knowledge. Members opposite all know that. I know that; we all know that. We have been talking

Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Frank Alban; Mr John Castrilli; Speaker; Mr Martin Whitley; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Joe Francis

about the need for reform in local government, and what are we doing? We are flopping around the edges. Change is hard and it is seldom welcome. It is so complex that sometimes it is easier to just sit back and do nothing. However, I can tell the house that if it is too hard to do, it does not mean that it is not the right thing to do. This is the right thing to do.

Mr P. Papalia: What's the right thing?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Reform in local government. The member does not agree with reform in local government. This government was elected to effect change, and we are not going to let the public down.

Mr P. Papalia: Speak to the amendment.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am speaking to the amendment.

Mr P. Papalia: No, the amendment that is opposing your forced amalgamations.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: That is what I am speaking to. The former government watched the good times roll on and did nothing. It had a bloated bureaucracy and there was no planning for the future. One particular area of neglect is local government, and the former government neglected local government reform. It dropped the ball. It did not meet its obligations to make Western Australian local government the most effective and efficient in Australia. The Labor Party's former Minister for Local Government —

Mr J.N. Hyde: Which one?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Ravlich—the upper house member for the East Metropolitan Region—is on the record —

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: The minister may not know—he is new to this place—that when a member of this house refers to a member of the other place, he or she should be referred to by his or her correct title, not by his or her last name. I ask that the minister abide by that practice in future.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have just been informed by the Clerk that there is no rule to prevent a member using the surname of a member of the Legislative Council in this house. Would the minister carry on, please.

Debate Resumed

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: In saying that, I do apologise, because I was not quite sure of her title. I think it is upper house member for the East Metropolitan Region. I apologise.

Mr M. McGowan: I accept that and I thank you. However, I think the way a member would normally say it is Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Okay. I thank the member. I agree with her, because she said that any reform in local government would avoid duplication of services and future cost savings could be directed to community services. Therefore, members on this side of the house, and in particular me, agree with her. A more streamlined and more efficient local government sector will be able to provide those services and direct money to the community. Although the minister's words were noble, the political will for reform was not there. Members on this side of the house are not going to make the same mistake. Western Australia is over-governed. Many people would be amazed to know that we have 139 local governments in Western Australia. Just over half of them have 2 000 or fewer residents. I think the statistics show that 55 local governments have a representation rate of one elected member to 100 or fewer electors; 17 of them have a representation rate of one to fewer than 50 electors; and about two of them have a representation rate of one to fewer than about 20 electors. Members opposite cannot tell me that that is right. We have 139 organisations out there that have about 1 250 elected members.

Mr V. Catania: They are very important local members.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: They are. They do a very important job, member. I am the first to agree. I have been there and I know what it is like.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Why don't you just fix it?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: To put it in context, New South Wales has a population base of close to seven million people, and it has 152 councils. A state that is fairly comparable with Western Australia is South Australia. It has a population base of about 1.6 million, and it has only 68 local government areas. To point out the parlous state of local government in Western Australia, the Local Government Advisory Board, in its 2006 statement that was provided to the former government, said that there was an urgent need for structural reform of local government in Western Australia. It said that structural reform would make the local government system more effective and

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in the longer term facilitate community sustainability. What was the former government's response to that? Absolutely nothing. What did it do in eight years? Three amalgamations happened in eight years. The opposition has a three-point plan to do what—amalgamate another three in the next eight years? Is that its three-point plan for the next eight years?

Similarly, the Western Australian Local Government Association's own review says that local government stands poised at a critical time, with structural reform providing a significant opportunity. By doing nothing, the best interests of local communities will not be served and the legitimacy of local government will be undermined as a consequence. There is no denying that local government has always had broad support for reform, but there has never been the stomach for reform. That has been lacking.

Mr J.N. Hyde: What are you going to do?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The local government area is in dire straits.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Warnbro has been shouting now for about 20 minutes. Will he please stop it.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the member for Bassendean making adverse comments? The minister.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: This government will not deny that people need communities. However, people need communities that are sustainable. A recent analysis shows that more than half of all local governments in this state are financially unviable without ongoing external support. The Western Australian Planning Commission has forecast that a quarter of the state's local government areas will have a net reduction in their population size over the next 20 years.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Are you trying to attack Bill Mitchell's council? Is that what you're trying to do?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: No, I am not attacking anything. Recently I announced that councils should consider voluntary amalgamations to create a more sustainable and better resourced local government sector. That is what I announced recently.

Mr V. Catania: Will you reimburse local governments for the cost?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I will answer that. Last week the Department of Local Government and Regional Development distributed the structural reform guidelines to each and every local government to assist in the process. Contained in the guidelines is a reform checklist to be completed by each council executive. The document will act as a very important resource in allowing each council to examine its own operational capacities and capabilities, its strategic directions and its resource allocation procedures.

Mr P. Papalia: But it doesn't tell them what size you want to achieve.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Hallelujah, brother! Why should I tell them what size to achieve? I have asked local governments to voluntarily look at their own operations to see where their strengths and weaknesses are, where the gaps are and whom they can partner with so that they can fill those gaps and address those weaknesses. I want local government to come back by the end of August and tell me what they think the ultimate configuration of the local government picture in Western Australia should be. That is what I have asked them to do.

Mr P. Papalia: What if they don't?

Mr T.G. Stephens: Or what?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am very confident —

Mr D.A. Templeman: What if they say, "Up yours, minister. We don't want to do anything else"? Are you going to sit there and do nothing?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Let me put it this way: if the local government sector does absolutely nothing and goes the way it is going, it will not get anywhere.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Mandurah!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members! I cannot hear the minister speak.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Frank Alban; Mr John Castrilli; Speaker; Mr Martin Whitely; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Joe Francis

Mr D.A. Templeman: I hope that Hansard got the comment of the member for Wanneroo.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I asked the member for Mandurah to keep quiet. He should not interject again.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Western Australia is the only state not to have undertaken any meaningful reform. In the past century, there has been a reduction in the number of local government councils in Australia by about 55 per cent.

Mr J.N. Hyde interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: There were 1 067 councils in Australia and now there are 556. That decrease does not really include Western Australia, which in 1910 had 147 councils and now has 139. In the past century, we have remained relatively unchanged, despite major demographic and economic and technological change. That puts pressure on the sustainability of communities. It is a real problem. I will share some information with members.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I have been listening to and watching the debate. All of us in Western Australia, particularly those in regional Western Australia, are interested in this matter. Members on both sides of the house might want to listen to what the minister has to say. They might not necessarily agree with him; they might have other propositions. I am sure that there will be other occasions in this house when they can put those propositions. I would like to hear what the minister has to say.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr M.P. Whitely interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Bassendean! I just spoke to the house. I think the member was in the chamber at the time. In fact, I am sure that he was in the chamber. I formally call him for the first time.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I will share with members some information that has been given to me about the 2007 local government elections. Sixty of the 139 local governments had elections at which some of the councillors in some of the wards were unopposed. Of these, 41 local governments conducted elections at which all vacancies were uncontested. I do not believe that is a healthy situation. That is a huge disconnect with the community. Members opposite might have a different opinion, but that is my opinion. The Local Government Advisory Board, in its 2006 structural reform report, concluded that there were financial benefits in the larger local governments as they delivered economies of scale and they can provide facilities with funds gained from within their own districts. It also concluded that only one-third of Western Australian local governments could be considered financially sustainable and that there has been a general decline in asset values right across the industry. That means that the assets are getting older and have a reduced life. As I have said, the Local Government Advisory Board advised the previous government in 2006 that there was an urgent need for structural reform in Western Australia and that structural reform would make the Western Australian local government system more effective and would, in the long term, facilitate community sustainability. The previous government did nothing in eight years. I will tell members what it did in eight years. There were so many ministers who had responsibility for the local government portfolio in those eight years that nothing was done. The previous government had a three-point plan. It achieved three amalgamations in eight years. What will happen over the next eight years? There is an appetite within the industry for reform. There is support within the industry for reform. There is some financial assistance for local governments to help them with their submissions.

I think the member mentioned earlier that the Western Suburbs Regional Organisation of Councils is the biggest stumbling block. I do not know whether he read the newspaper yesterday —

Mr P. Papalia: What?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Someone opposite said that WESROC was the biggest stumbling block to local government reform.

Mr P. Papalia: No; check *Hansard*. We were talking about what the Premier said two years ago.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am sure that I heard something like that.

Mr J.N. Hyde interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Perth. I know the member has an abiding passion for local government and I encourage him in that. However, at this moment I encourage him to desist from interjecting. I call him formally for the first time.

Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Frank Alban; Mr John Castrilli; Speaker; Mr Martin Whitely; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Joe Francis

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The other day WESROC passed a resolution to look at local government reform. It had three options: firstly, to split the six councils into two; secondly, to amalgamate the six councils; and, thirdly, to look at a complete resource-sharing model for the six councils to form into one. Those are the three options that were put forward.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Warnbro!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I know that some members opposite agree with what I am doing.

Several members interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: There is support in the area.

Mrs C.A. Martin: There are some on your side who don't agree with what you're doing, too.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: That is true.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Warnbro and member for Kimberley!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I will read out a couple of comments, because there is support for local government reform. Gary Gray, the federal member for Brand and Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia, said that the reform strategy announced by the Western Australian local government minister, John Castrilli, would have the potential to deliver better services and infrastructure for local communities. The chief executive officer of one of the shires said that the shire commended the minister on his proactive initiative in generating debate on issues that had largely been deferred by successive governments to the potential detriment of the local government industry. The shire agreed that there needed to be some rationalisation of local government boundaries and that amalgamations may be an appropriate mechanism to deliver to localities in the regions. I have another comment from the president of a shire.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Wanneroo and member for Kimberley! One of the problems that arise when the minister starts reading a document is that other members find other things to talk about. I call the member for Wanneroo formally for the first time. I call the member for Kimberley formally for the second time. I urge the minister to get to the core of this matter.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I could go through all the support that I am getting from local government if members would like me to. As I have said, with a reform process and change, there is always somebody in opposition.

Point of Order

Mr V. CATANIA: Can I ask the minister to table the documents that he is referring to?

The SPEAKER: The member can ask the minister.

Mr V. CATANIA: Can the minister table those documents?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I will not table those documents. They are my notes; they are not official documents.

Mr P.B. Watson: But you said that they were letters from people.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The Minister for Local Government just told us that he was reading from letters to him —

Mr G.M. Castrilli: I was not reading from letters.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Why did the minister tell the house that he was reading from letters?

Mr G.M. Castrilli: I was reading from my notes.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The minister has misled the house.

The SPEAKER: Members, this is not an opportunity for debate on this matter. The minister has indicated that they are his notes and will not table them. If they were official documents, there would be some expectation that they be tabled, and that would be reasonable. However, if they are his notes, there is no expectation that they be tabled. As I have already indicated to the house, if there are further interjections, more members will be called.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Mr Speaker, if they are not letters and the minister is in fact reading his notes, can you direct the minister not to read his speech?

The SPEAKER: I can.

Debate Resumed

Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Frank Alban; Mr John Castrilli; Speaker; Mr Martin Whitley; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Joe Francis

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Let me finish by saying —

Several members interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: We are talking about reform of local government, which everybody knows has to happen —

Mr P. Papalia: We are for reform, but we are not for forced amalgamation!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: There is support out in the community —

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, the first four letters of the word “Warnbro” should have been what you accepted in the previous times I have mentioned your name. I call you to order formally for the first time.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: It is very clear that the Labor Party is not interested in the reform process of local government, full stop. That is what it is. I can tell members that I have asked local governments to come back to me on a voluntary basis at the end of August. I am very confident they will do so. I look forward to receiving their recommendations by the end of August.

Amendment put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (26)

Mr A.J. Carpenter
Mr V.A. Catania
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms J.M. Freeman
Mr J.N. Hyde
Mr W.J. Johnston
Mr J.C. Kobelke

Mr F.M. Logan
Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan
Mr J.A. McGinty
Mr M. McGowan
Mrs C.A. Martin
Mr A.P. O’Gorman
Mr P. Papalia

Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mr E.S. Ripper
Mrs M.H. Roberts
Ms R. Saffioti
Mr T.G. Stephens
Mr C.J. Tallentire

Mr A.J. Waddell
Mr P.B. Watson
Mr M.P. Whitley
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.A. Templeman (*Teller*)

Noes (27)

Mr P. Abetz
Mr F.A. Alban
Mr C.J. Barnett
Mr I.C. Blayney
Mr I.M. Britza
Mr T.R. Buswell
Mr G.M. Castrilli

Dr E. Constable
Mr M.J. Cowper
Mr J.M. Francis
Mr B.J. Grylls
Dr K.D. Hames
Mrs L.M. Harvey
Mr A.P. Jacob

Dr G.G. Jacobs
Mr R.F. Johnson
Mr A. Krsticevic
Mr W.R. Marmion
Mr P.T. Miles
Ms A.R. Mitchell
Dr M.D. Nahan

Mr C.C. Porter
Mr D.T. Redman
Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr M.W. Sutherland
Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr J.E. McGrath (*Teller*)

Amendment thus negatived.

Consideration Resumed

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [4.15 pm]: I will take this opportunity to reply to the Premier’s Statement. When I listened to the Premier’s Statement, I thought the two best things the Premier said were “Mr Speaker” and “thank you very much”! As a regional member, all the rest in between was very disappointing.

I want to talk about things that are happening in my electorate. The Albany electorate has survived a long time. Albany Woollen Mills has closed, the whaling station has closed, and everyone has seen doom and gloom, but Albany has always survived. There are problems in Albany. Our harbour is full of ships. Those lucky enough to get up early and walk along Middleton Beach will probably see seven or eight ships in the harbour. These are either ships that, because of the late harvest, are waiting for grain or ships that cannot get work anywhere else so they just wait in the harbour. That is of concern to me, because when all these ships are waiting in the harbour, what do they do with their rubbish and sewage?

Mr D.A. Templeman: What about the bombs?

Mr P.B. WATSON: We have bombs in the harbour too! I have written to the Minister for Environment to find out what is happening. It is a real concern in our town.

Woodchips are lying on the wharf because Japan and Korea are not using woodchips as much. Our woodchip factory was doing five 24-hour shifts a week; now it is doing only four 12-hour shifts. The Green Range mine has been put on hold indefinitely. Some corporate bandits came down from Singapore and told us that they were going to build a new hotel on the Esplanade Hotel site. They were going to knock down our beautiful hotel in Albany. I must congratulate the late Paul Cherry and his family, who built the Esplanade Hotel. That family came in, knocked down the old hotel and straightaway built a great hotel that looked as though it had been there for a long time. Now these corporate terrors have come in and said that they will build a new hotel, a big flash thing, with all the rooms overlooking the harbour. What have we got? We have the most expensive sandpit in Australia! I think they paid \$11.5 million for the Esplanade Hotel. I said in Albany this week that we have to try

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to find some local government by-laws and state government legislation to stop these people coming in and developing the site. Members should not think that it will not happen in Bunbury or Geraldton or Broome—Kalgoorlie has not got much of a beach. Wherever there is prime real estate, developers can come in and knock down buildings.

Albany is crying out for a five-star hotel.

If people come to Albany at Easter and try to book into a bed and breakfast, they will find there will be no accommodation at all. In Albany at the moment everything is full. We have to look at ways to fix this so that this cannot happen again. This group has made excuses all along: the architect was sick; they were waiting for a restaurant owner to come from Sydney. Just before Christmas they got us all excited that we were going to see some movement on the Esplanade Hotel, so they sent a grader down and a water truck. All they did was water a little bit and put some canvas around the outside, and they then nicked off. As I stated to the local media in Albany this week, they should either put up or put out! Let someone get in there who wants to do something about it.

Skywest is a big issue in Albany, and I think the member for Geraldton will probably have the same issue.

Mr I.C. Blayney: They are all right! I like Skywest!

Mr P.B. WATSON: Obviously the member does not like being on time and likes not getting meals on planes. Maybe in Geraldton it is different because Skywest did have competition there.

I am not going to knock Skywest; I am looking for a solution. Skywest's biggest problem is with its air service. It cannot get any more Fokker planes. So I suggested to the former Minister for Planning and Infrastructure that we hold a meeting in Albany, and we invited all the major airlines from around Australia. The only ones that turned up were Skywest and the government one, Marumba.

Albany Airport does not have security. It was interesting to read the story this morning about how people were able to take guns on a plane in their luggage. A person who gets on a plane in Albany can take a bazooka and a tank because there is no-one to stop passengers doing so. People can walk straight on the plane with anything they want. But any passengers intending to travel back to Albany from Perth who happen to have a nail file on them will find that the security people will make them put their hands up against the wall and will frisk them. It is double standards —

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: It is just that the women in there find you so attractive!

Mr P.B. WATSON: The member can frisk me anytime!

We are trying to get a jet service to Albany. The big problem is that to have a jet service that carries over 50 people we need to have full security. The member for Armadale said in her speech in Albany, "In the al-Qaeda handbook it says, 'You don't attack planes with 50 or less; you only attack planes with over that number'", so we need to have security if the service will carry more than 50 people. The ridiculous thing is that it is going to cost the City of Albany and Skywest over \$3 million to provide full security in Albany. I think we should have full security there, but I think the federal government should pay for it.

We want to increase tourism in Albany. Albany used to have three services a day; now we are down to two, and on some days there is only a there-and-back service. If we want to increase tourism in Western Australia—this is something I will be taking up with the Minister for Regional Development—we should have jet services to Albany. That would open up the area not only from Perth to Albany, but also over to the eastern states—I know Kalgoorlie has a service over east—and to Asia, as we are so close to Asia. We have the beautiful Albany links golf course, which the Japanese golfers love to play on. We have that opportunity to get people to come down. One of my bugbears is that when people come to Albany they say, "I wish I had a bit more time. I want to spend a bit more money", but they have come down the other way, through Margaret River. Margaret River gets all its money from its caves and it gets all the tourism money, which I think is unfair. We have to put up with what we get from the City of Albany, which is very, very little, but I must admit that the Amazing Albany campaign has been very successful. I want people to fly to Albany, pick up a car and drive back, or drive down to Albany first, get the worst part of the trip out of way, and then sip their way through the wineries down there. Albany has such tremendous tourism potential.

I know members will be disappointed if I do not mention people's names. I want to talk about things that I have listed, but I will not read them all; I will just refer to them as notes. Fuel cards for seniors—where are they? I applaud the National Party for the idea, but where are they? Also, my constituents in Albany want to know whether carers will be entitled to get that card. A carer may be looking after a senior who has a car, so the carer drives that car. I would like to see the Minister for Regional Development ensure that carers get a card too,

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because it is very important for them. There might be two people in a family who have two licences, so they will get twice as much, whereas as person who has a carer will get nothing.

The Albany Primary School year 6 students from room 11 have made three DVDs. Emily Shale wrote this letter to me. One of the DVDs is called *Walkabout 07*, and features the year 6 and year 7 students walking from Walpole to Denmark—we make them tough in the country! Another DVD is called *The Making of Pimpernel*, which was a musical performed by the year 6 and year 7 students at the town hall. The final DVD is *Rotto Doco*, and it covers the five days the year 5s spent on Rottnest on a school camp. There are plans for another three DVDs, one of which will be about the Torbay catchment, which is tremendous; the kids are getting out there and looking at what a great job the Torbay people are doing out there. The other DVDs will be called *Walkabout 09* and *Rotto Doco 09*. People knock the young people of today about drugs and so on, but these are great young people, and I must congratulate their teachers. These young people are getting a good look at the way things are done. I am going out to the school to have a look. I do not want to get in on the documentaries—I am trying to get in on *Lockie Leonard*, but they will not let me!

That is another thing that is happening in Albany—*Lockie Leonard*. Tim Winton, a local boy, wrote a book called *Lockie Leonard*, and we had a very successful television series filmed in Albany. Now, everywhere we go in Albany there are lights and police and we cannot get in because they are using Albany scenery for *Lockie Leonard*. That is just another thing that happens in regional areas that many people would not know about.

Young Cody Knapp received a kidney transplant after four and a half years on dialysis. He is now living the life of a normal 13-year-old boy. Cody's transplant capped the most successful year for transplants across Australia.

I met Dene Leekong, the new police district superintendent, the other day. I would also like to say what a great job Ross Tomasini did. However, an article in the paper today lists all the Western Australian crime scenes. The great southern region recorded the lowest figures for burglary, theft and car theft statewide. Just one in 88 residences was burgled—I suppose I will go home now and find that my house has been burgled; one in 43 people had something stolen; and one in 719 people had their car stolen. I congratulate the Albany police for doing a tremendous job. I will be fully supporting them in their enterprise bargaining agreement when it is up for discussion. It will be nice this time not to have them outside my office.

Peter Mueller was awarded Country Player of the Year at the 2008 WA Table Tennis Association awards. The Albany Table Tennis Club junior players were also recognised for their efforts over the 2008 season. Graeme Drew was named Australia's Local Hero on Australia Day for his contribution to ocean safety. I will be talking about Graeme in my 90-second statement in Parliament next week. Our local junior players won the International Tennis Federation Junior Grass Court Tennis Cup in Wodonga, Victoria. From the Albany Tennis Academy the single players were Rob Partington—whose dad was a candidate for Albany in the last election—and Matt Thompson, both 15 years old. The doubles players were David Lloyd and Sheldon Scott. The women's doubles were Ainsley Harrison and Sally Partington—a daughter of Andrew. They all went through undefeated. We are breeding very good tennis players down there because we have a very good system. The WA title for junior sedans winner was Daniel Hade. He won at Les Gorman Park on the weekend of 24 January.

With a grant of nearly \$10 000, Albany-based four-person band Arons Crusade will release its first 12-track album this month. Homebrew, another of our local groups, will also be releasing an album. The winners of the Men's Resource Centre fun run over 5.2 kilometres were Callum Dowell and Katherine Hancock, who also won the Bay Merchants Triathlon Series. Susan Bennetts was awarded the Premier's Australia Day Active Citizenship Award. She has limited vision but still continues to work across a number of organisations within the community. Other nominees were community volunteer Cyrill Lovitt, who does a tremendous amount in our community; environmental advocate Patricia Sundstrom; and sports organiser and promoter Steve Marshall. Zoe Southworth won the Premier's Australia Day Active Citizenship Award for a Person under-25 for her contribution to the youth community even whilst completing her tertiary entrance examination.

The Albany Regional Volunteer Service was awarded the Premier's Australia Day Active Citizenship Award for a community group or event.

It was great to see shark attack victim Jason Cull's return to the water. I was down at the beach the morning of Jason's little—or not-so-little—incident. I got there just after it happened and when I saw Jason's leg, I thought that he would never walk again." He not only went back to an event, but also went back into the water. The member for Willagee has also been back into the water in Albany, but I noticed that he did not go out very far at all.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: I went about three kilometres this time.

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Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, right along the edge! Jason returned to the water for the 2009 Albany Open Water Swim around Princess Royal Harbour in February and won the 1.5 kilometre division.

A new colony of potoroos has been placed at Manypeaks. They have been moved after success at Bald Island and Two Peoples Bay. I would like to congratulate the potoroo group in Albany; it does a tremendous job. I have been out and seen what this group of dedicated volunteers do to look after a near-extinct group of potoroos. They do a tremendous job and, as volunteers, I cannot say enough about them.

The Albany Women's Centre has had to turn away victims of domestic violence and their children as Albany's housing crisis worsens. The centre is also having to turn away women who are homeless and who cannot get public housing because of the length of the waiting list—even the priority list is at least a five-month to six-month wait. After being in government for a period, I understand that this is a tremendous problem. I assume it is the same in the city. Homelessness is a huge problem in regional areas. People are sleeping in cars and sleeping on the streets. Young people are sleeping at the forts in Albany. In this time and place, I would have thought that everyone would have a secure place to go home to at night. I know that I always kissed my children goodnight in the knowledge that they were secure in their beds, yet some of these people cannot even get a bed. It is a real concern and I am quite willing to work with the current government to see what we can do about it.

I served on a task force in Albany—I am not on it at the moment—that was looking at getting more funding to support men in regional areas. I want to talk about the Men's Resource Centre. Andrew Markovs and his group do a tremendous job. I have spoken to the Minister for Health today. When we were in government, we funded the centre for, I think, one year and then gave them another year of funding. That funding has now run out. The minister has intervened and given the Men's Resource Centre another 12 months of funding; for which I applaud him. The centre, along with the farmers' associations and other groups, is trying to prevent men in the regions from committing suicide, which is a huge issue in the farming areas between Albany and Esperance. These groups do a tremendous job, and are there for men 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.B. WATSON: Today, if there is an incidence in a home involving domestic violence, the people from the Men's Resource Centre are there to help. I know from speaking to Superintendent John Watson when this legislation came through, that the police place a violence restraining order on a person straightaway. A guy, who may or may not have been violent—I do not know what has happened—is now on his own out on the street. He is either very angry and/or possibly wants to get back to his home. He still has the keys to the house because the police do not take away his keys to the house; all they do is they place the VRO on him so that he cannot visit the house even though his kids might be there and his food is there—everything is there. These men would be out on the streets but for the tremendous job that is done by the Men's Resource Centre.

The Minister for Corrective Services, who is just now leaving the chamber, has said that there are no issues in the south west with Albany Regional Prison. I suggest that if the minister visits Albany, he does not call us the south west, because we are very parochial and we are the great southern. However, Albany Regional Prison is overcrowded. The prisoners are double-bunked in a maximum security prison.

Mr J.E. McGrath: Wouldn't you double-bunk if you were in Albany Regional Prison? It's cold!

Mr P.B. Watson: I do not know the member for South Perth's preferences at night! I have been out to look at the prison, and I know that the minister has been down there.

Mr C.C. Porter interjected.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes; but it is a maximum-security prison. I am just passing on the concerns of my constituents who work there.

Mr C.C. Porter: My eye is well and truly upon it.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes.

On Wednesday, 18 February, 300 people walked up York Street to Alison Hartman Gardens to celebrate National Sorry Day. I congratulate all those concerned. We have done National Sorry Day very well in Albany. We had a great day when the apology was made, and it was great to see recognition of the day carried on by people.

I congratulate our local schools, all of which participated in fundraisers to assist the people affected by the Victorian bushfires—most raised close to or more than \$1 000. Albany's community has been incredibly generous, with businesses and locals donating money, goods and even freight costs to assist in rebuilding the lives of those affected by the fires.

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Dr Jim Leighton swam from Perth to Rottnest in eight hours and 20 minutes; probably about the same time as the wait in our doctor's surgery! It was a tremendous effort by Jim and many of the local people who went across on surf skis and the like.

Princess Royal Sailing Club is 100 years old this year. Was the member for Willagee there when it first started?

Mr A.J. Carpenter: No, I do not think so.

Mr P.B. WATSON: The 2008 City of Albany Sportsperson of the Year Awards were held. The winner of the junior award was Kathryn Slattery, a great all-round sportswoman. Steve Hurley, one of our top rifle shooters, won the senior award; and the winner of the veteran award was Geoff Faulkes.

The Albany Chamber of Commerce and Industry awards for 2009 have been held. The award for best micro business, employing one to four persons, was won by Powell Security; the Australia Post Award for businesses with five to 10 employees was won by Ryan Waugh Hairdressing; the Albany Port Authority Award for businesses with 11 to 20 employees was won by Brooks Garden Chemmart Pharmacy; and the Lincolns Award for a business with more than 20 employees was won by the Dome café. The City of Albany Tourism Award was won by Beach House at Bayside. The Skywest Community Award went to the Police and Community Youth Centre, which does a tremendous job. The Best Franchise Business Award went to Dome Coffee. The Great Southern Development Commission Award was won by Alkoomi Wines. The Timbercorp Agribusiness Award went to Australian Allwood Coppicing and Pruning Services. The Small Business Development Corporation Home Based Business Award winner was Stirling Valuations. The Small Business Centre Business Achiever Award was won by Camping World Albany. The Telstra Country Wide Businessperson of the Year was awarded to Russell Harrison from Lincolns. Russell does a tremendous amount for our community. He is on the port authority board and the development commission board and he is a very astute businessman who does a lot for our community.

The Business of the Year Award went to Ryan Waugh Hairdressing. Ryan and Rebecca Waugh are cousins. They do a tremendous job. They started their little business, and if members were to talk to most of the women in town, they would say that they get their hair done at Ryan Waugh—I suppose the men do too if they like to have hair with a bit of a tint.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Member for Albany, who was that—Ryan Waugh?

Mr P.B. WATSON: Ryan and Rebecca—Becky—Waugh.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Whose children are they?

Mr P.B. WATSON: Rebecca is the daughter of Robin Waugh and I am not sure whose son Ryan is.

The career of Albany Royals football coach Darrell Panizza was recognised on 11 March when he was inducted into the Western Australian Football Hall of Fame. I have a list of his achievements. He has been a tremendous sportsperson at both the state and regional level. He played 354 football games—274 for Claremont, 74 for Woodville and six for Western Australia. He coached Claremont Football Club from 1995 to 1998, Western Australia in 1997 and the Albany Royals from 1999 to 2004. I think he won six or seven premierships with the Royals.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: He won six premierships in a row.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Six in a row says an ex Albany Royals footballer.

My old mate Alan Watling came to Albany when he retired from footy and worked in the post office with me. He is a great fishing mate of mine and a great footballer. The only trouble is that when he came to Albany, everybody wanted to knock his head off—and a few succeeded!

Some of my constituents are very concerned about local dental services. When Labor was in government, I visited Albany with Geoff Gallop, the then Premier. We brought in people from South Africa—a husband and wife—who stayed in Albany. They have done their time and they now have their own business in Albany. It is tremendous to see them do well. However, the waiting list for dental services in Albany is atrocious. If someone goes in for a filling, it might be done, but if some other work has to be done, they have to come back in six months. The waiting list has always been an issue. We tried to fix it by bringing in people from overseas, and I think that is what we are going to have to do again.

BHP Billiton, the corporate bandit, came to town, promised everything to everybody in the region and then let us down. I was most disappointed for the many young Nyoongah people whom we were having trouble with and who, when we got together with the elders, got jobs at BHP Billiton.

The young kids were proud to show off their cars and other things that they had never had the opportunity to get before. They were promised that the jobs would last a long time and so the young kids invested. They did not

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splash their money around. Their main status in their community is their car. A lot of them have lost money and they have had to hand back their car. Many people in Albany have lost their jobs. It is a huge problem. I hope BHP Billiton Ltd does not knock down the plant. There are rumours around Albany that some of the shipping companies have been asked to give quotes. It is terrible. I was involved on a committee and we went down there and had a look. When BHP Billiton first came, it was going to employ 250 people and the government provided facilities for that. Then it was to be 500 and we looked at providing facilities such as housing and water. Then the estimate was 750 people. BHP later said that it did not have enough money for the police station and so the government put in \$18 million for the school, but then BHP pulled the pin. To me that is the same as what happened with the Esplanade. Companies come into regional towns and promise everything but give nothing.

I congratulate the people of Albany for filling out the Albany Police and Citizens Youth Club petition. The petition we submitted has changed the minister's mind. I would like to know what is happening with the ring-road. I will ask a question on notice about that. Before Christmas two very young Nyoongah girls hanged themselves in Albany. It is a huge problem. There have been others but I will not talk about them here. It seems to be a real problem in not only the Nyoongah community, but also other communities in regional areas. We have to do something about it. Andrew McGovern is very concerned about that. He is involved with the Gerard Neesham football academy. Every day he has parents tell him how concerned they are about what is happening to their children. They do not want to see their children lose their lives. That is something we must work on. It is not something that we can sweep under the carpet. We cannot lose nine and 10-year-old children because they are hanging themselves. We should not lose anyone because they are hanging themselves. Their future was ahead of them but they could not see a future. I wonder whether it was because of drugs, violence or whatever; I do not know. Whatever it is, we must look at it.

Dianne Wolfer has a new book out called *Lighthouse Girl*, and Jon Doust has a book out called *Boy on a Wire*. They are two of our local authors. Albany has such a tremendous artistic community. Those two books have been previewed in *The West Australian*. All these things are happening in a small place like Albany.

Fighting in schools is another issue that has come up in Albany. Most people would have seen on television the children from North Albany Senior High School getting into fights at school. There is a simple answer to that: get more sport back into schools. Kids are standing around at lunchtime. When we were kids, we would go out onto the oval with footballs, cricket bats and stumps and everything. Kids cannot use a mobile phone when they are trying to mark a football or trying to take a catch, although some kids will try. We must provide alternatives. We cannot just sit back and say that they are bad for doing it. We must provide alternatives. There should be more sport in schools. The Minister for Sport and Recreation and I have been mates for a long time and we both agree that it is very important to combine sport and health. It is no good bringing in health after everyone has become unfit. We must educate kids. If a young girl wants to lose weight, what does she do? She starves herself. She does not know that she should walk for 15 minutes in the morning. We teach kids about reading, writing and arithmetic but we do not teach them to exercise on two or three days a week. If they just went for a walk, they would be healthier. Through my own kids, I have seen their friends get anorexia because they do not know what to do. No-one tells them to go for a walk. They think that they will be okay if they do not eat. They want to look like Kylie Minogue. I want to look like Kylie Minogue too, but it will never happen!

The Albany Surf Life Saving Club is another big issue that I must not forget. The Liberal Party candidate came to Albany after the Premier had been there. Rob Lucas rang his wife Jo Lucas and was on the speakerphone when the Liberal Party candidate said that whatever the Premier offered, he would match. Now we are having problems. He is now saying that he did not say it. He did not realise that he was on the speakerphone. Rob Lucas and his wife attended a function that the Premier was at. Rob Lucas said to the guests and the media there that it did not matter who got elected because the Liberal Party had promised to match the Labor Party. Now the Liberal Party is denying it. Rob Lucas is a very highly respected man in the community. He and a shark hero are both being called liars by the Liberal Party. The Minister for Sport and Recreation was down there for the Sports Star of the Year awards and he said that he would look into it. I do not want to get into the political side of it; I just want to see a surf club in Albany. I am critical of the City of Albany for not putting money into it. Young people come along to surf clubs and they exercise and save people's lives for the community. They do a great job.

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot) [4.45 pm]: Mr Speaker —

Mr T.G. Stephens: The Premier wants you. He has a promotion for you!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I thank the member for the compliment! I thank you too, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make the most of the last sitting hour this week. I should start on a light note. Some members might not be aware that news.com.au has started an online poll today regarding the future of the member for

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Armadale. I could not help myself and I had to vote. I got a message back thanking me for voting. The poll states —

WA MP Alannah MacTiernan is thinking about a move to federal politics, should she —

It was a multiple choice answer. Members can go online now and vote. The options are —

Go Alannah, Canberra needs livening up

That option is currently sitting on 45 per cent. The second choice is —

Is she deserting a sinking ship?

That has scored 26 per cent. The third option, which I voted for is —

She's an elected WA MP, do the job here

I thought I would share that with the house.

The reason I rose today is I have seen some things this week that have alarmed me more than anything else I have seen in the first six months that I have been a member of this house. I refer to the conduct of some members of this house on a certain issue. I was a little alarmed about the member for Willagee, who made comments today when he was addressing the Treasurer that clearly painted the Treasurer as being anti-bus drivers, anti-tourism operators, anti-small business and anti-big business. It reinforced the conception that everyone else and I had about how much the member for Willagee hates *The West Australian*. He questioned the integrity and ability of one of Mr Stokes's chief executive officers to remain impartial on a government board. As I said, it highlighted the former Premier's hatred of our leading state newspaper.

Moving on, the thing that most disgusted me was the sleazy politics that I heard in this house and in the Legislative Council, and what I read in the media this week relating mainly to the member for Rockingham. It started with comments the member for Rockingham made on Tuesday. I refer specifically to the appointment of Senator Chris Back. I would like to go on record as congratulating Senator Chris Back. He was a fine candidate for the Liberal Party and I wish him well in his career. Noting the comments the member for Rockingham had already made, I humbly suggest that he consider making an apology to everyone who is over 80 years of age. When he questioned the appointment of a gentleman to a government panel, he implied that people over the age of 80 are unable to contribute to society in any meaningful way. We are also approaching the anniversary of a previous apology given by the member for Rockingham. I refer to his slur against ethnics in this state. We know that he has it in him to apologise for his comments. I refer in particular to the *Hansard* from last Tuesday when he was talking about the joint sitting of both houses to endorse the selection of Senator-elect Chris Back. He made the following comment. I am not suggesting it is misleading in any way, but I think I should correct him on it. He said —

In the US, someone intending to attain an office to which that person has not been elected is put through a process by which his or her history, rights, qualifications and the things that person has done in the past are examined to determine whether the person is a fit and proper person to fill that position

Those are the member's exact words from *Hansard*. If the member for Rockingham was referring to the appointment of a secretary of state or a secretary of defence, fair enough. However, if he was referring to the appointment of a senator in the United States, he got it grossly wrong. There is a situation in the US at the moment where the Governor of Illinois has been impeached for trying to sell the senate position that had formerly been filled by newly-elected President Obama. Therefore, the situation in the United States is not quite as the member for Rockingham has purported it to be. I am glad that we have a somewhat more transparent process in Australia for the filling of casual vacancies in the Senate. The member for Rockingham went on to say —

We request that the Premier provide, instead of a standard speech without much detail, a full and proper explanation of why Mr Chris Back is a fit and proper person to represent the state of Western Australia, —

I suggest that our six senators do an excellent job. I would be amazed if any members on the other side could even name their six senators.

Mr M. McGowan: There are not six, for a start!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The four Labor senators. Sorry. I stand corrected. He went on to say —

— and indeed that he answer some of the questions that have been posed about Mr Back's activities in 1987.

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That was gutter sleaze. There is no other word for it. In case the member thinks I am wrong, I also want to refer to the transcript of the 6PR Radio morning program on Thursday, 12 March. During that program, Simon Beaumont and Bob Maumill referred to the comments that had been made by the member for Rockingham. The member for Rockingham has raised the option of questioning Mr Back's past. When we went into the joint sitting of both houses of this Parliament, I saw him sitting near the dispatch box, and he had his books open, but he was obviously put back in his box by the Leader of the Opposition, because, instead of doing that, he remained silent. I have been informed that he did not shake the new senator's hand as he walked past him; he just ignored him. That is fine. There are no laws against that. However, he then peddled his sleaze and innuendo, like a spineless jellyback, up to the press gallery—I saw it on the ABC News last night—and for that he should apologise.

Point of Order

Mr M.P. WHITLEY: Mr Speaker, the member made a comment about another member that is clearly unparliamentary, and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I did not know that the term "spineless jellyback" was unparliamentary, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: To that point of order, member for Bassendean, I would be unfamiliar totally with whomever the member for Jandakot may or may not be referring to. It is not a point of order.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am referring to the member for Rockingham, Mr Speaker.

Mr M.P. WHITLEY: Mr Speaker, your ruling was made on the basis that you were unaware of whom the member for Jandakot was referring to. He has just flouted your ruling by saying he was clearly referring to the member for Rockingham. I ask him to withdraw.

The SPEAKER: Order! Well, in the circumstances—I appreciate what the member for Bassendean has said—I have heard the member for Jandakot, and if indeed the reference was to the member for Rockingham, I have heard other things in this place that have been equal to, or more derogatory than, shall I say, the words that the member has attributed to perhaps the member for Rockingham. I would just urge the member to continue with his speech.

Debate Resumed

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The member for Rockingham's behaviour this week was wrong, and he should apologise.

Mrs C.A. Martin interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, member for Kimberley! I appreciate what the member is saying. If the member does have some points to make, she will have an opportunity to do that. I call the member to order formally for the second time. I suggest to the member for Jandakot that he choose his words carefully in this place if he wants to participate in intelligent conversation and rigorous discussion. While I am on my feet, might I also inform members in this place that if they are going to quote from *Hansard*, it has to be a corrected copy of *Hansard*. I do not know. Perhaps the member for Jandakot was paraphrasing what he heard or allegedly heard the member for Rockingham say in this place. I am not sure on that. The member is unable to quote from *Hansard* until it is a corrected copy. If it is the copy from Tuesday, at this point I do not think anyone in this place has a corrected copy. I provide that to the member in terms of advice. I now ask the member to continue, and to use language in this place that is going to be understood by everybody so that we do not have continual points of order about what the interpretation might be.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I return to the 6PR transcript. I will not reiterate the whole history of the event in 1987, because clearly Dr Chris Back at the time—now Senator Back—did nothing wrong at all to deserve the treatment that he has received this week. I am happy to table this transcript. In that transcript, Bob Maumill says that Dr Back did not swab the horse because his prime duty was to save its life. He goes on to say —

Now the reason they didn't swab him is ... cause the ... swab boxes are intensely hot and they're usually in there for 15 minutes and maybe 30 minutes —

That is the horses —

— to get urine out of them. Dr Chris Back and the other two vets were there and the stewards had to make a decision, what do we do here, if we don't treat him and we put him in the swab box and he dies the public tear us to pieces, if we get the swab we've got a dead horse.

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Therefore, the comments made by the member for Rockingham about that matter are absolutely wrong. Bob Maumill goes on to say —

Now think about this, people forget about it, the two that finished behind him never earned stake money again.

Simon Beaumont then said to Bob Maumill —

You need to ring Mark McGowan and tell him all this Bob?

Bob Maumill responded to that by saying —

He is an idiot ...

Simon Beaumont then said —

He's the member for Rockingham.

To which Bob Maumill said —

He is an idiot ...

Simon Beaumont then said —

He's your bloke ...

To which Bob Maumill said —

And behaves like one ... they should know this, and those people who are trying to blaggard Dr Chris Back for doing his job, and that goes for Ripper and it goes for ... Mark McGowan.

They are trying to blaggard Chris Back for saving the horse's life. Bob Maumill goes on to say that when the member for Rockingham was the Minister for Racing and Gaming, he was an absolute embarrassment for his lack of knowledge of the industry and of his own portfolio.

Mr M. McGowan: You're good at quoting quality sources, aren't you?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Indeed. I will quote another source, member for Rockingham, because this is not the first time the member for Rockingham has peddled this kind of stuff. This goes back to about a year ago, when an email was released. The email is between the member for Rockingham and the former Premier, Brian Burke. In this email, the member for Rockingham intentionally disobeyed the orders of the Premier at the time, the member for Willagee, in relation to dealing with Mr Burke. This all comes down to what I would refer to as the integrity of the member for Rockingham. I would like to question that on the record. I have another document, which I am happy to table. It is an advertisement that appeared in my local paper in 2005. It states that tougher streets and penalties are a top priority for Mark Norman Francis. The member for Rockingham describes himself as determined, active and well qualified. I suggest that the only thing he is determined, active and well qualified for is discrimination and sleaze. I have one message for the member for Rockingham: in what he has done this week, he has reached the ceiling of his political career. He has reached a new ceiling and new heights. The member for Rockingham needs to come to terms with the fact that he is never going to become deputy leader of the Labor Party. He is an embarrassment on his side. The member for Rockingham should do the right thing and fall on his sword and apologise or resign.

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