

MINING — ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

48. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I have a supplementary question. Under the minister's watch, the departments he is in charge of have reduced their regulatory presence to protect our environment, failed women on mine sites, failed juveniles in the justice system and failed to keep the lights on. What is it that the minister does to earn his ministerial salary?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please! Those final few words were the member's question; the rest was a preamble. I could direct the minister not to answer, but I think as a special punishment, I am going to direct him to give a lengthy answer!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

When the member for Central Wheatbelt was the Minister for Water, how many thousand people got disconnected, member for Bassendean?

Mr D.J. Kelly: A lot—2 600 a year.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: There were 2 600 people losing their water. The former minister was part of a cabinet that destroyed the state's finances. When this person was in cabinet, every metric for Western Australia went backwards. We were in recession! When this minister was in charge of the finances of this state, Western Australia had growing unemployment. This is the thing; this is the hypocrisy of the opposition. Let me go through it. What did the member ask about mining? If she had listened to the answer I gave, I explained why there is no risk to the environment from the procedures we agreed to.

Ms R. Saffioti: It is a detailed answer!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I do not want to have any misunderstanding. The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety is an environmental regulator. People think it is there to promote activity in the mining industry. It is not. It is an environmental regulator. I explained in detail why it is possible to temporarily move resources from one part of the agency to another. Let me make it clear: the approvals are still environmental regulation. We moved it from the monitoring of environmental regulation to the implementation of environmental regulation. We did not leave environmental regulation; we just emphasised a different part of the environmental procedures. The basis of the allegation regarding that part of DMIRS shows that the member for Central Wheatbelt is not capable of being a shadow minister. At the last election, the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies had a forum, and four people turned up. I turned up as the minister. The now Leader of the Opposition turned up as the Nationals WA spokesperson for mines and petroleum. The then shadow minister, my good friend Bill Marmion, turned up, and I am sorry that I do not remember who it was from the Greens who turned up. I made the point that I was the only person there who wanted to be the minister. I want to know: Do National Party members think they are going to form government at the next election? Is that how arrogant they are? The Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that he does not have to do any work to become Premier.

Mr R.S. Love: I didn't say anything of the sort!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: He did. He said that oppositions do not win; governments lose. That is his plan. His plan is to do no work and he so arrogantly thinks he is going to become Premier. He arrogantly thinks he is going to become Premier. This is just ridiculous.

The member for Central Wheatbelt asked about sexual harassment in the mining industry. For the first time ever, under my leadership of the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, we have elevated the question of sexual harassment. The inquiry showed that the entire time members opposite were in government—the member for Central Wheatbelt was a minister at the table—nothing happened. What we now know is that businesses have been using hush money to protect the perpetrators of sexual harassment. I gave a press conference in December 2021 drawing the attention of the community to the fact that mining companies had used hush money to protect perpetrators. Now that is an agreed fact—a year and a half after I pointed it out.

The member asked about keeping the lights on. As I explained yesterday, people are literally coming from all around the world to see how to achieve and how to manage the lowest cost electricity in the western world for household consumers here in Western Australia! It is the lowest cost. I will also make the point, Madam Speaker, that we insist on charging the same price to all consumers, including all those in the National Party, which is a policy that was going to be junked by the Liberal Party, its coalition partners, at the last election. The Liberal Party specifically said it was going to junk that policy. We are keeping it. We are protecting National Party members. Understand this: if the Liberal Party had got its way, prices for people in regional Western Australia could have

gone up by 1 000 per cent. There are individual towns in Horizon's footprint where consumers pay one-tenth the cost of supplying that electricity. The Liberals said they wanted to make it cost reflective.

What was the other one? It was about youth justice. Let me make it clear. I remind members, and I have quoted this report before—it was tabled in this chamber in 2012 when the member for Central Wheatbelt was sitting at the cabinet table —

Ms M.J. Davies: No.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Well, when her team was sitting at the cabinet table, an Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services report was tabled in this chamber described how lockdowns were being used for punishment at Banksia Hill Detention Centre. That does not happen and has not happened at any time during my term —

Several members interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: No, members do not understand.

Several members interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes, there are lockdowns occurring —

Several members interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Lockdowns are used when it is lawful to do so. Go and read the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services' 2012 report in which he described how they were being used as punishment and a methodology of discipline. I do not accept that, and it does not happen now. This is the thing: in 2013, the former government moved 85 youth detainees to Hakea Prison, yet I am criticised because 17 youth detainees have been placed in a separate unit at Casuarina Prison, with no contact with adult prisoners. The hypocrisy that drips off the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA is disgraceful!

The SPEAKER: Before I give the member for Geraldton the call, all questions are at the discretion of the Speaker. Supplementary questions in particular are at the discretion of the Speaker. They were introduced into the Legislative Assembly a bit over 20 years ago now. The concept was that the person who asked the original question could ask a short, sharp second question—just a question—not on a new topic, but pertaining to the original question. In response to that, they should get a relatively short answer back, not an answer the same length as the original answer. The opening question in Parliament is often about three or four parts long. There are three or four questions that can raise a number of issues and therefore we get a lengthier answer. The supplementary question, for it to work well, needs to be a simple, direct question pertaining to the original question, and the ministerial response should be on that particular topic, much more narrowly on the question that was actually asked.

What we have seen today, repeatedly, is people not taking the advice on supplementary questions. They think that I am just going to let them keep asking them. I have said that I will not. On this particular occasion, I thought that it actually deserved a lengthy answer because it was an inappropriate question and it got an inappropriately long answer. I would ask those members asking the questions to take that advice on board. I would also ask ministers perhaps to just consider that your first answer is the lengthy answer and the supplementary answer should be a relatively short answer. The other thing that ministers might want to anticipate in giving that first lengthy answer is that it seems that a supplementary is asked every time, so if there is one more point the minister wants to make, potentially they could make that as part of the supplementary answer if it is appropriate.

The member for Geraldton with the last question.