

## ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

### *Consideration of Tabled Papers*

Resumed from 13 June on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Emergency Services) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 2203A–E (2023–24 budget papers) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 11 May 2023.

**THE PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy)** [2.09 pm]: We are about to hear the inaugural speech of Hon Ben Dawkins. Before I give the call to Hon Ben Dawkins, I take this opportunity to remind members about the customs and courtesies observed for all new members. An inaugural speech is untimed and the timers will not be used. The speech should be heard in silence and other members should not stand or leave the chamber during the speech. The new member should be heard without interruption or interjection. The new member’s inaugural speech should not directly criticise other members or otherwise provoke interjections or points of order, and the rules of relevance are not applied to an inaugural speech. Having outlined the customs and courtesies observed during an inaugural speech, I now give call to Hon Ben Dawkins.

**HON BEN DAWKINS (South West)** [2.10 pm]: Good afternoon. Thank you for having me, Madam President. I am not interested in politics. Politics in itself does nothing to help the people. One definition of politics is “activities aimed at improving someone’s status or increasing power within an organisation.” It is pretty obvious that by that definition I am not interested in politics because I blew the whistle on the corrupt inner workings of the Labor Party, leading me to be expelled with no status or power in any organisation. I can proudly say that I failed at politics but succeeded in Parliament, which suits me fine.

It is with exceptional pride that I have taken the parliamentary oath to serve the people of Western Australia. It would have been very hard to serve the people of Western Australia from the Labor Party, particularly as a Labor backbencher acting and voting on party lines, not to mention that the Labor Party rarely seeks to serve the people of Western Australia and mainly serves itself.

Note that the definition of politics I referred to does not include anything about serving the people. I will repeat that definition of politics: activities aimed at improving one’s status or increasing power within an organisation. I cannot avoid the label of politician, but I prefer the label of parliamentarian and I would love to be a statesman, but that is a high honour that can be assessed and bestowed upon you only by others.

On Monday, former Premier Hon Colin Barnett, AC, was recognised in the King’s Birthday honours, and I congratulate former Premier Barnett. But what is most interesting is what *The West Australian* said about him and also Mr Barnett’s interview on ABC radio. *The West* described Mr Barnett as one of this country’s last statesmen, which I find interesting. A statesman can be defined as someone who does everything for the common good of the people who he or she represents and could be thought of therefore as the opposite of a politician. This seems to be something really worth aspiring for, does it not? The parliamentary oath to faithfully serve the people and the title of honourable member seems to suggest that statesmanship is what is wanted from us, not political manoeuvring. In his radio interview, Mr Barnett said that at the beginning of his time as Premier, he made certain commitments to himself that his government would be one of integrity, that was honest and did the right thing in accordance with moral principles. This is why an understanding of ethics and even philosophy seems to be more important to me in this role than anything else. It also tells me that it is important to define your principles at the beginning of the new role and go forth with those principles, always defining your approach to each issue you encounter along the way. Surely if you hold true to the principles of honesty, frankness, fairness and serving the people, you cannot go too far wrong, can you?

I am very fortunate that I come from the legal profession, which has a set of conduct, rules and ethical standards based on honesty, frankness, service and avoiding conflicts of interest, and I understand that those things need to be at the centre of every action we take. I was probably dismissive and even critical of Mr Barnett because, being a member of the Labor Party on and off but first joining 34 years ago, I was typically partisan and biased and probably a bit childish in the way that I slavishly dismissed anyone from the other side of politics, but there was something about Mr Barnett that gradually over time began to impress me—an honesty and directness that was powerful. In regard to Perth Stadium when there were attempts to scupper the project due to concerns about contamination at the site, Mr Barnett simply said, “If there’s contamination there, we will dig it up and remove it.” I suspect that the public was grateful to Mr Barnett for being undeterred by the noise and providing a stadium that has now hosted an Australian Football League grand final, amongst other great events.

On the reduction of dangerous shark numbers after a fatal shark attack at Cheynes Beach in my electorate, Mr Barnett said in relation to his catch and kill policy, “I don’t do that with any sense of glee. I regret that. But, at the same time, my responsibility as Premier is to the public of Western Australia.” Brilliant. Note Mr Barnett’s commitment to the public of Western Australia, not his own popularity. Contrast this with the current government’s analysis paralysis when it comes to dealing with the recent fatal shark attack in Swan River at North Fremantle. It looked

like a kid either caught the offending shark or one very similar in the river on the following night, and we were not even allowed to take that one shark out of the river. It is well established that governments have a right to control animal populations, both feral and native, if there is a risk to public safety and the native animal species is not endangered. The killer shark species is not endangered and continues to be a threat to public safety, so taking one, particularly one that fits the profile of a recent killer, is perfectly justifiable. Even if it only makes a difference of one, it would be a difference and it could be the difference that saves a child's life.

Refusing to take any sharks that meet the profile of a dangerous shark in a swimming area is political correctness gone mad. I would like to cut through political correctness and the woke agenda by being honest and direct and always working on what helps the lives of the electors. That is an aspiration and hard to implement, I know. Perhaps both Mr Barnett and I are politically incorrect, but sometimes being politically incorrect is the morally correct thing to do. I can probably prove that I am politically incorrect because I am the only one standing here today in this chamber who has been expelled from a political party, which, in itself, is proof perhaps. I am not proud of political incorrectness. It is not something that I set out to be; it is just the result of wanting to be direct, honest, truthful, forthright, open and frank. I do not know whether it is possible to serve the people of Western Australia in the south west by rigidly sticking to the conventions of political correctness and applying a political or woke filter to everything I do or say.

I have said very little so far until today, but I take the oath to faithfully serve the people of Western Australia very seriously, as I do my oath to the court and my undertaking to represent my mainly pro bono clients in the courts. To me, there is only one way, and that is without fear or favour. Having no fear is powerful. That is why I think I have a good chance to be one of the first people to be re-elected in this chamber at the next election in 2025. I am unhindered by the party system, at least for now, and that is the way it should be. Australia needs more Independents like Andrew Wilkie and even Jacqui Lambie. We love Jacqui because she reads things thoroughly and then speaks bluntly about whether or not it is good or bad for her beloved people of Tasmania. Jacqui is real—very real. She is too real for most and therefore unfairly criticised. Jacqui is good for democracy. She is a real person in the Parliament with real feelings and real life experience, real tragedy, real mistakes and real stuff-ups, real hardships, real thoughts and real words. Keep it real, Jacqui. We love you. I find you very loveable.

I will say a bit about my principles and my hopes for the future. I grew up in Nannup in the south west. My mum moved there from Perth in 1979 after divorcing my dad, Roger, the professor, medical doctor and immunologist. My mum met Steve, my stepfather. Steve's parents came from Croatia to Fremantle in 1936 and then moved down to Nannup. They were given 240 acres of jarrah and red gum and told that if they could clear it, they could keep it. An early settlement scheme for migrants. Steve was born in 1937 into this environment: a dirt floor with snakes and mice crawling over him. Steve became a farmer and a tree faller in the bush, working in a radius of around 160 kays from Nannup through nearly to Margaret River down towards Augusta at Warner Glen and towards Donnybrook, Manjimup, Greenbushes and Bridgetown. In 85 years, Steve never left his farm in the south west. Steve's best mate was the late Johnny Tomasi, a classic south west Italian. Steve would cut down the trees and Johnny would snig them in with the loader. They worked all over and were renowned jokers and pranksters. Steve once put a live dugite in the cab of a ute belonging to a forestry officer. Steve hated the government and any authority because they were always telling him what he could and could not do in the bush, which trees could be felled and which had to stay.

Johnny reckons Steve saved his life a few times, and vice versa: a better pair of characters in the south west you could never meet. It was a robust environment for me to grow up in; there was pilfering of all kinds happening down there. We spent half our time chasing kangaroos, foxes, rabbits and emus. The means of capture were not always correct by today's standards. There was marroning out of season, although Steve told me that this was done in the company of the local police sergeant at the time.

I went everywhere with Steve; I loved him and he loved me. He died last year. He wasted away in a nursing home in East Fremantle, of all places. I tried to get him back to Nannup Hospital, closer to his farm where he had lived for 84 years; Douglas Valley, he called it. The complaints section at the Health Department said he was a category 4, and Nannup Hospital only took category 3 people. "To hell with your categories," I said. "Steve hated the government, and now you're trying to kill him. He will die in Perth in a nursing home. He was born on the farm and thrives in the bush." I rang Roger Cook's office; I tried everything, including offering to build a mini-hospital on the farm, but nothing worked.

Steve went downhill in the city, like the last Tasmanian tiger in captivity in that grainy footage, pacing around its enclosure, pining for home and freedom. Captivity was what killed him. Steve said, "Norm,"—he used to call me Norm—"it would be good if you get into that Parliament, son. You can help me out and get me back to the farm, son." I said to Steve, "I didn't get in. I was number five on the ticket, Steve. Only the first three went in, Steve." "You'll get there, son," he said, and then said—I will quote, if I can—"and give 'em shit when you do."

I am proud to be here, Steve, but it is too late. Steve died last year, and we lost a unique character known across the south west. My mother meanwhile effectively joined the hippie commune in Nannup, so Steve and mum were an odd couple. Mum probably only stayed a couple of nights in the actual commune, but frequently visited the hippies and was mates with them all. Mum was generally happy that I was chasing kangaroos with Steve; she did not have to worry about me then. She was a bit worried when, looking for something to eat in the pantry, I came across a large Milo tin of green, leafy stuff; my honourable colleagues to my right would have been delighted! Mum said she was looking after the stash for a hippie friend, and I believed her. Mum was actually too fond of the civilised world to be a real hippie; the lack of sanitation and eventually diseases like hepatitis that went through the hippie commune in Nannup actually put a few people, like mum, off, and she quickly returned to relative civilisation with us three kids and Steve.

I chopped and split a lot of jarrah rounds in my youth—a huge amount. I had to fill the wood shed all the time, and Steve was a hard taskmaster, one of the hardest. I got his belt around my bottom regularly—say, every three months. Sometimes he would slap me with an open hand—not to the face and no bruising or anything—but it was really just a wake-up call. I was a dreamy, studious kid, and the slap generally did me good, in my opinion. Any kind of verbal putdowns really hurt me, but the slaps were directed at making me work harder, chop more wood, be kinder to my mother and other things that were all valid behaviours worth reinforcing with a slap. In my experience, it did me no harm and a fair bit of good.

When I was out at the woodheap I used to listen to ABC radio—Bob Hawke and Treasurer Paul Keating—and dream about being in Canberra. My uncle John—“Jo”—Dawkins was in Canberra at the time and was Minister for Education and, later, Treasurer. I was obsessed with high office—the pride that would come from serving the people; the potential to lift the country out of recession, as it was at the time; and the honour of public service. I was hooked on that idea, so, like my uncle John, I took off to the University of Western Australia to study economics and, much later, human resources at Edith Cowan University and law at Murdoch University. But I was going to Canberra, that was for sure; there was no other conceivable destination for me.

It did not happen. I did spend a lot of time—some of it wasted—working for finance companies, mining companies and law firms. I also wasted a lot of time attending Labor Party meetings. It was not totally wasted, because I got here eventually on the back of a Labor ticket, and I am grateful for that. But I found the party system totally confusing. I wanted to be involved and get on the road to Canberra and do something, yet we were always talking about campaigning for some union-backed candidate and promoting the Labor brand based on very little substance, from what I could see. Rather than getting to serve the people, I seemed to be further away than ever.

I learnt over time that these were not meetings, as such—not places where you could speak freely—but actually sleeper cells for the factional war games. The candidates were selected years in advance by the factional overlords in the unions, and unless you were the second coming of Christ, you would not get preselected ahead of the union and factional favourites, hacks and time-servers. Even Jesus, being a carpenter back in Jerusalem, probably would not have had the numbers; the carpenters’ union was not the dominant faction back then, in the year 3 or 4 BC!

Nonetheless, I am proud to be here. I also want to provide some focus out there on people who are struggling. I do not want to dwell on, or be defined by, mental illness, but I am sharing—probably oversharing—so that even one person might feel empowered to keep working towards their goals, no matter how bad they are; people at their lowest ebb. I want to say that I know, from experience, that you can be happy again.

At the Marian Centre, Perth Clinic, Hollywood Private Hospital and, on the public side, Alma Street in Fremantle and Bentley Hospital, there are silent sufferers, forgotten by the mainstream. I know you feel like giving up. I know that mental illness can be totally debilitating. I was an inpatient at the Marian Centre about four times between 2016 and 2018, for up to three weeks at a time. I was one of the worst; no treatment would help. I did not have electroconvulsive therapy—although that was recommended—but I had just about everything else, pharmacologically and counselling-wise, that you could have.

I went backwards for a while: catatonically depressed and anxious. I got there through negative thinking, beating myself up and feeling inadequate professionally. I was working all hours of the night, suing banks, government departments and mining companies on behalf of the little guy. I loved the work and I loved being what I call a public interest lawyer. But I was paid peanuts and the clients had no money. The defendants had all the money and all the big law firms working for them, so I did not feel valued. I thought I was a loser compared with my mates, who had big jobs, working for the same banks, government departments and mining companies.

I drove myself into a huge hole, hating myself. My only suggestion to others with a debilitating illness like this is to take a step towards your goals; preferably—but not always—this is a step forward, but any step will do. It might be like me—forcing myself out of bed and walking around the block just once. One of the steps I took getting back from the brink was deciding to stop working for my father, who I had begun working for at the time, and be independent and self-governing again. But another step, a bit later in 2020, was when I applied to run for the South West Region in this chamber. The WA Labor state secretary at the time was very supportive of my past

mental illness and encouraged me to nominate for South West Region. I even tried to get the fourth spot on the ticket, but lost to John Mondy at the administrative committee stage, six votes to seven.

For me, a big part of getting out of that hole was allowing myself to dream again about serving the people. My inspiration for sharing my pathway back to recovery from mental illness comes from His Honour Mark Ritter, recently appointed to the bench of the District Court. Upon his appointment he was quoted as saying the following about law firms and mental illness —

“Examples of bullying, sexual harassment, unreasonable work hours and expectations from or condoned in one way or another by partners and principals are matters of great concern to the profession and something should be done about it,”

... I think that the way to move some of these issues forward might be collective bargaining for working conditions and maybe even a union to involve in work practices that are not up to standard.”

“In my case, the pathway for getting here has only been with the assistance of people who have helped me with my personal anxiety, self-esteem issues and shortcomings as a person. I will not name them, of course—those people in the medical and broader professions—but I do thank them.”

Like His Honour, I will also thank my helpers in the medical profession, particularly my psychiatrist at the Marian Centre—a more genuine and encouraging bloke you will never find. My psychiatrist said that, up to 2017, I was —

... ‘plagued by a very obsessional personality framework, and a deeply held fear of making mistakes, letting others down, doing the wrong thing ... This set of vulnerabilities likely originates from a childhood picture of pleomorphic anxiety/OCD, and a subjectively punitive parental figure (father), with a deeply seated sense in Mr. Dawkins of failing to meet the perceived expectations of others’

I have been particularly well and happy since 2018, Madam President, and aside from some relationship issues and some more brutal treatment from principals of law firms that has caused temporary lapses into anxiety and sadness, I am fully recovered. I use the words “mental illness” to describe my historical suffering because we should be direct and honest. Everyone has varying degrees of mental health, but it is mental illness that is the hardest to recover from and needs the most urgent treatment.

In any case, I campaigned, doorknocked and phone banked in Fremantle and volunteered on election day in Bunbury, and I was a candidate in the 2021 election. I received a letter of recognition and thanks from Premier Mark McGowan saying that I had performed a vital and important role in the re-election of the McGowan government and performed my role as a candidate with distinction. You could imagine my disappointment when I received no response to my calls and emails to Mr McGowan to discuss my situation leading up to the recount earlier this year. I acknowledge the very good people Hon Alannah MacTiernan and Mr John Mondy, and their decisions that ultimately opened up the opportunity for me, but there was no accident: I was preselected, entrenched on the ticket and the process governed by the Electoral Commission played out. I was even more horrified when Mr McGowan said to *The West Australian* that I was elected by accident. It was a dishonest and hurtful thing for him to say. I am certain that no-one has been elected to this chamber by accident by the Electoral Commission process. It is a very well defined and regulated process.

It is also a democratic right to initiate court proceedings against those who have done wrong. I was staggered to see Mr McGowan publicly state that me suing WA Labor over the corrupt manipulation of the preselection for Forrest was one of the reasons that I was to be expelled. Taking legal action was the best thing I have ever done. Our kids need to know that you must stand up for yourself. Democracy only works when citizens participate and exercise their democratic rights. Mr McGowan’s understanding of legal principles and ethics seemed to have waned since his study of the law, or perhaps Mr McGowan deliberately abandoned those principles to obtain and exercise power unilaterally. In most organisations that are regulated, there is a prohibition on taking retribution against those who have blown the whistle; but, alas, as I will come to later, political parties are beyond the law in Australia. I saw none of the integrity that Mr Barnett I think is now famous for. It is worth reflecting on contrasting styles of leadership and that sometimes organisations promote leaders because they are bold and decisive, which is attractive. But equally, those leaders can lack empathy for others or even publicly ridicule them. Power is what they crave and they have little regard for the effect that their actions have on others.

I have grave concerns about the morality of mandating an unproven vaccine, and coercing people with the threat of losing their jobs into receiving a vaccine that in some instances has caused adverse events. Unless something was proven to be safe, or even 99.9 per cent safe, you could not in all good faith mandate it, could you? You could not coerce people to take it, could you? That would be a step too far, surely. Encouraged, but mandate and coerce? No. I have empathy for those who exercised their fundamental individual freedom to choose what medical treatment is injected into their body and therefore lost their jobs, and for those who were coerced into receiving Mr McGowan’s vaccine and now regret it, particularly those young people like my nephew who are suffering adverse effects of the unproven vaccine. Mr McGowan saw a high rate of vaccination as a way to improve his popularity. His motivations were to obtain more popularity and power.

I have similar concerns about how one could use their power to remove regional representation in this house and use their power to guarantee more power. That sounds power hungry. It should concern all of us that Mr McGowan rushed through an act of Parliament to quash an existing legal right held by Mr Clive Palmer. His motivation was that he did not like Mr Palmer. Where does that kind of breach of legal principle end? If the Premier does not like your mum, dad, spouse, daughter or son, will he retrospectively remove their legal rights, too? In planning, I hold similar concerns about the removal of elected councillors from the planning approvals process, and given Mr McGowan's proximity to property developers and his willingness to chase and receive their donations, that decision also looks a bit murky. Democracy and civil liberties are being destroyed in WA and in any way I can, I dedicate this term to restoring them.

It is also the party system that is killing democracy; it is absolutely stuffing up democracy and accountability completely. The Labor Party is killing democracy in this state. I stand here today, hoping to represent the people in the regions, the south west, but also out into the wheatbelt where I have worked. Can anyone think of a better region in the world to represent than the area from Mandurah to Albany? A better place in the world? If you asked me to represent the south of France, I would say "Get lost". Margaret River; Dunsborough; "Busso"; Bridgetown, where I used to play footy; Hamelin Bay, where I go salmon fishing every year; Nannup, where I grew up; Denmark; and Albany, effectively the original capital of this state and from where the Anzacs left to sail to Gallipoli. I stand here today, having stood as a Labor candidate for the south west, campaigned in Perth and Bunbury in 2021, only to find that when I get here two years later, Labor has destroyed the representation from the regions. Have political parties done this? Yes. I look to my left—he is not here—but I refer to Hon Darren West, a real farmer. I was going to ask whether the honourable member voted in favour of abolishing specific regional representation in this house. I read his speech supporting the abolishment of the regions. I find it hard to believe that his constituents at the time would have wanted no regions, but it is not his fault; you have to vote as a bloc in Labor, do you not? It seems to me that he was forced to vote for his party and not his people. Honourable member, this encapsulates the problem with political parties, particularly Labor and the Labor majority in this state. Democracy has been destroyed in the sense that the elected representatives do not act and vote in favour of the people. Even worse, they vote in favour of further destroying democracy by removing democratic representative mechanisms such as regions in this chamber, which have traditionally given people in the country a say. It is a compounding problem.

The parties are the blockage that breaks the link between what the electors want and what happens in this house. Democracy dies when this happens. What was the motivation for this change? Labor, already the dominant force in WA, wanted to become more dominant by effectively legislating its way to a guaranteed majority in this chamber forever into the future. Labor and the unions are essentially creatures of the metro area. Yes, they have members in the bush, but here in the city it has a campaign workforce of union members and other inner-city volunteers who volunteer in their thousands in the hope of being recognised by their overlords as loyal apparatchiks, who will campaign on any basis to win government. This happens in the city—not so much in the country. Labor will dominate the city vote as a result. The opposition parties do not have this army of volunteers. In a Council without regions, the campaigning will be done in the city where the candidates think that the majority of easy votes are to be won. By extension, only city issues will be championed. Candidates are unlikely to be campaigning in the bush. They will need \$1 000 of diesel, a packed lunch and water bag to drive to remote communities in the hope of getting a single vote. Where is the return in that? There is no longer an incentive to campaign in, or indeed serve, the bush. Rewards drive behaviour. It is human nature, so nearly all candidates will focus on capturing the city vote, the low-hanging fruit. The city vote is also largely a Labor vote, so the Labor Party has stitched up the people of this state quite nicely, has it not?

As I said, I have not spoken much in this place, but I have spoken about Glen Iris Golf Course in Jandakot. The Labor Party has served itself but not the people. If I am one of the first people to be re-elected in this building as I hope to be, I am told by Leanne of the residents group in Glen Iris that the member for Jandakot will be one of the first to lose this seat. The reason: he is representing the party, not the people. In three years, he has refused to do anything to help Leanne and the others. He says that he cannot. It is true. If he speaks to the residents and supports them, he will have to go against what he has been told to do by his overlords in the government. His overlords have met with the developers, accepted \$27 500 in political donations from them and approved the development, despite the elected council overwhelmingly rejecting it nine votes to one. Disgustingly, 10 000 signatures on a petition to this chamber opposing the rezoning were ignored. The member for Jandakot has now apparently blocked the residents from his social media. In what way does that amount to delivering on the oath to serve the people of Western Australia in this building? Keep quiet, support the party not the people—that is the opposite of effective democracy. I will try to change that here. I could never do that as a Labor backbencher and I am very pleased not to be a lame duck Labor backbencher, prohibited from speaking for the people, prohibited from voting in accordance with the electors' wishes and instead voting on party lines.

I also want to say something about the word "corruption". My first question to this house was shouted down because I used the word "corruption". The Corruption and Crime Commission website says that corruption includes deliberately failing to perform the functions of office properly. I will not attribute that to any individual, but I think

it is time that we all grew up and became a bit less precious. Standards of accountability of parliamentarians need to lift. Failure to listen and act on the voices of the electorate should be grounds for removal from office. I have never imputed or implied that there are brown paper bags changing hands, but there is dereliction of duty going on. Corruption, in the modern sense, covers all forms of improper use of office and deliberate failures to perform the role properly. If it is to be tackled, we need to talk about it and understand it. To shut down any talk of possible corruption because it might be an uncomfortable discussion to have would be corruption in itself.

Democracy has failed to adapt to the modern world. It is a perfect storm, driving governments and political parties into the realm of minority interests, populism, sensationalism, political posturing, creative accounting, information control, disinformation, misinformation and media management. I talk today about what is critical to advancing and protecting our democracy, exposing the secret operations of the institution known as a political party and reforming this ghastly institution. There are dozens of examples in recent years wherein political parties or their office bearers have faced allegations relating to their conduct. This includes branch stacking, bullying, intimidation, defamation and discrimination. This is often in the context of preselections that are undemocratically manipulated by the factions intent on removing the right of branch members to cast a local vote. It also extends to other conduct including wrongful expulsions without affording natural justice and manipulating the rules of the political party to suit their needs at the time. In fact, the rules of the political party in democracy as the whole appear to be largely ignored.

It may interest members to know that democracy, as we know it, was first created by accident. For decades after the first Reform Act 1832 in the United Kingdom, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party debated how, and to what extent, they would further expand the franchise or pool of voters to include the working man. Each side would only support such a measure if they believed it benefited them. Call it luck, a fluke or divine intervention, but in 1867 William Gladstone, leader of the Liberals, and Benjamin Disraeli, leader of the Conservatives, finally agreed to further reforms that would double the franchise from approximately one million to two million voters. Both believed that the reforms would benefit them. It created a need to attract volunteers so the political parties could communicate with the masses. However, unsurprisingly, the party elites, whether deliberately, sociologically or a bit of both, were not prepared to surrender their power. They needed a way to attract volunteers but keep those volunteers away from the party decision-making.

It took 35 years before the Russian political scientist Moisey Ostrogorsky first analysed the inner workings of this new version of a political party. Nine years later, an Italian sociologist by the name of Robert Michels expanded on Ostrogorsky's work. What they argued was that the modern political parties were not engaging, and never intended to engage, with the members as the community believed and continues to believe today. The structure of the so-called modern political party was created to preserve the power of the elites or wire-pullers, as Ostrogorsky put it. In fact, Michels described it as inevitable that political parties would become oligarchies, concentrating power in the hands of a few people rather than the members. The honest truth is that political parties are not democratic and arguably never have been, despite claiming to be so. They do not afford local members direct and exclusive say over preselections and other decision-making. Power is centralised in the hands of the select few individuals, many of them outside the elected members of the Parliament. These individuals have been called many things: factional leaders, factional warlords, powerbrokers, faceless men and wire-pullers.

The political parties control the selection of candidates for Parliament and, therefore, who is ultimately elected to Parliament, and exert significant influence over the policy decisions of governments and also receive substantial sums of public money. There was \$74 million in the last federal election, with \$27 million to Labor and \$26.5 million to the Liberals—to run in the federal election, effectively. They perform public functions and, therefore, are in substance and practice a public institution. How can they be given public money, yet they are not even regulated? They are not even required to incorporate.

Within decades after 1867, power transitioned away from the parliamentary leaders to the so-called unelected wire-pullers inside the political parties. This continues today. They sit in the shadows, away from public scrutiny, influencing if not controlling the decisions of government by controlling the inner workings of the party. Within the Labor government of WA, these people are the union leaders, the left faction unions, mainly Carolyn Smith and the United Workers Union. They control preselection, policy, rule changes and the exercise of all power inside the party. They care not for the party's rules. They exercise their power at will. They care not for democracy or for the people; they care only about power.

Mark McGowan was not aligned with a union and that saved us and the budget, to a degree. If history repeats, it is likely that Roger Cook this week will embark on a series of transactions to pay back the United Workers Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union for installing him as Premier. We will pay for that! There will likely be a raft of higher-than-necessary inflationary pay increases, not because we asked for it, but because Mr Cook owes a debt to those who have the real power behind the scenes.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, member! I have been listening really quite carefully to your contribution, and I would just like to, at this stage, draw your attention to the general rules of the debate in the house, which also apply in an

inaugural speech—particularly to standing orders 44 and 45. In this regard, and in any debate, including your inaugural speech, words that are offensive or make personal reflections on members of Parliament in this house or in the other house are highly disorderly and could be determined as unparliamentary. If there are matters that you wish to raise, which you feel so aggrieved about, you may have the opportunity to debate those at other times. However, in the context of your inaugural speech, I will remind you again that personal reflections on members of Parliament in both houses may be considered disorderly.

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** I was going to say, Madam President, that I hope I am wrong about those pay increases. I just want to say that people are not fully aware of the conflicts of interest in this state but need to be told. Sunlight is the best medicine. Let us be transparent about to whom we owe our office.

Another possible source of influence over the decisions of political parties relates to political donations. There is at least a perception that money buys influence; that is, political parties are subject to the interests of those who fund them. This is another issue for reform. In this state with a massive infill housing program planned, we must, as I have alluded to, ban, for transparency, political donations by property developers in this term of government. Many people, including in Parliament, are too naive to see, too self-centred to care, or too scared to speak out about these things. As a result, a cancer to democracy is left unchecked, forever eating away at what democracy should be. This needs to change. Our citizens are entitled to know the truth, the whole truth, about how political parties operate, who is really making decisions and why they are making those decisions. They have a right to know how the decisions of their representatives and the day-to-day agenda of our governments are being controlled by external forces.

The rule of law does not apply to political parties. They can bully, blackmail, defame, discriminate and intimidate their members and candidates, and apparently they cannot be held accountable for it. They can arbitrarily expel people and exclude people from preselection or nominating for other positions. They can rig votes and internal elections and deny their members any say, and it is all okay! This can impact people's lives, personally, financially, psychologically, professionally, and their reputations. The parties have impunity. They are not bound by anti-discrimination laws. Their office bearers are not bound by professional or ethical duties. They are not required to actually be democratic. They can do all these things yet receive tens of millions of dollars from the public purse. Most political parties and their office bearers are, for all intents and purposes, above the law.

In my journey, I heard about factions and factional deals, but I thought nothing of it. Few people would open up about it. I attended branch meetings but did not enjoy it much. It was not until I sought preselection for the federal seat of Forrest that I soon experienced firsthand what it was all about. Steve McCartney, the state secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, told me that a deal had already been done. The seat of Forrest was already allocated to the left faction and his union, Steve and Carolyn would decide. I applied saying that I believed my application would be considered on its merits; however, it was not. The administrative committee simply rejected my application—or expression of interest, I should say—because I was not a member of the correct union, or any union. I had already been praised by Mr McGowan for my work in the state campaign and for performing my candidacy in the state election with distinction. No truthful reasons were ever given for my being eliminated before my credentials were even considered. There was no merit selection process. The process was a sham.

In 2013, the WA Labor Party changed its rules to create a two-stage process for preselection in which members would first have to submit an expression of interest to the administrative committee. That was the process I was in. It was hailed by the WA Labor Party, including Mark McGowan at the time, as a move towards democracy and greater local say in preselection. The administrative committee of WA Labor used its newfound power to execute applicants it did not want and allow candidates who aligned with predetermined factional union deals to progress. That is less democratic. The reasons for the changes to the rules in 2013 were a lie. Instead of the wire-pullers controlling the vote, they now control who goes through to a local vote. There has not been a democratic vote of branch members for preselection in WA Labor since 2012 in the federal seat of Tangney. The people's power has been deliberately cut out of the system.

In 2021, Ben Harris, convener of the right faction in Labor, sent an email to factional members about preselection for the federal seat of Swan. I table this email to the house.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, member. In order to table any documents, you need to seek the leave of the house.

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** I seek leave of the house to table this document.

**The PRESIDENT:** Is leave granted?

**Members:** Aye.

**The PRESIDENT:** Leave is granted.

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** I said no.

**The PRESIDENT:** Just one moment, honourable member. There may have been dissent in leave being granted, so I will put the question again. Is leave granted for the document to be tabled?

[Leave denied.]

**The PRESIDENT:** There has been an indication that leave is not granted; therefore, the document is not tabled. Please continue your remarks.

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** That is fine; I brought it in case.

In the email Ben Harris states, among other things —

On Friday, members of the Broad Left used their majority on the Administrative Committee to eliminate a candidate for preselection on factional grounds and circumvent the Party’s democratic processes for preselecting candidates.

...

Those who voted against our motion ultimately voted to deprive every rank-and-file member in Swan an opportunity to choose their preferred candidate.

...

However, the actions of the Broad Left to deny local electors any say in the preselection process is shameful. Swan is an important seat in the upcoming election and disenfranchising local members of the Party does nothing to help us win it back.

...

What does it say when a person of Fiona’s calibre is told that the Labor Party won’t even allow her to nominate for preselection? This is an issue not just in Swan but for any future preselection in WA if this decision stands. What is to stop those on Admin, who voted to circumvent the Party’s Rules, from doing it again?

This email is about Fiona Reid, who was arbitrarily eliminated by the left faction, which has a majority of votes on the administrative committee, because the left faction preferred its left candidate. The left’s candidate went on to win a seat in federal Parliament, which means that Fiona may have been unethically and immorally done out of a job in Canberra. I say “unethically” rather than “unlawfully” because although the party rules should have the status of law under contract and administrative law, due to a quirk in our common law, they do not. When Mr Harris asks what is to stop those on admin, who voted to circumvent the party’s rules, from doing it again, the answer is nothing. Such gross abuses of power have occurred ever since the rules were changed in 2013 with support from both the left and right factions.

I refer to Tristan Cockman’s book *Keeping one eye open: What the Parties aren’t telling you!* Can I apply for leave to submit a chapter of the book—to table it?

**The PRESIDENT:** Member, the form of words is that you seek leave to table the document.

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** I seek leave to table the document.

[Leave granted. See paper [2283](#).]

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** The book tells us that he was the only nominee when preselection for Cowan opened in 2015, having done a great job obtaining a swing in the previous federal election. In an effort to ensure that Mr Cockman did not become the WA Labor candidate for Cowan, the WA Labor Party, including now federal MP Mr Patrick Gorman, appeared to have conjured up two very doubtful expressions of interest out of time to justify reopening the expressions of interest and nominations process. Those expressions of interest were allegedly from someone who recently worked for Mark McGowan and a female person working in the media. The credibility and authenticity of the two apparent expressions of interest must be questioned in circumstances in which neither of those individuals became WA Labor Party candidates and there was no vote for preselection by local members or otherwise.

The subsequent resolution by the state executive to extend the expression of interest and nominations process then changed to allow anyone to submit an expression of interest and nominate rather than those two specific individuals. This is shown by the minutes. I seek leave to table those minutes.

[Leave granted. See paper [2284](#).]

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** There are many unanswered questions. Did the expressions of interest that were suddenly referred to exist? If so, who created and signed them? Were they legitimate? Or was that an elaborate ruse, an intention to trick the party’s state executive and Mr Cockman while concealing some hidden agenda or purpose? Similar things are happening at most preselections within political parties, yet our citizens do not know it. Executive committees and party officials are manipulating and abusing process to ensure that individuals aligned with their interests and ideology are being preselected. The process is a sham. WA Labor is not a democracy; it is a dictatorship. The



shameful reality is that the wire-pullers and unions control everything from the membership of the party and preselection to ministerial appointments and beyond.

Political parties and their office bearers are virtually completely unregulated, a law unto themselves—all powerful, unaccountable and untouchable. The only solution is incorporation and regulation. There should be a standard set of rules that all political parties must follow. These rules should enforce a separation of power between the executive committee, the members and the disputes tribunal; enshrine democracy, the rule of law and natural justice; promote equality, transparency and accountability; provide its members with due process—that would be good; create independent dispute tribunals; impose duties on office bearers and measures to avoid conflicts of interest; and, most important of all, prevent conflicts with a member of Parliament’s parliamentary duties.

Which common law currently applies to political parties? Since 1934, several dozen cases have involved political parties including at least 10 cases over the past five years. This is in addition to dozens of legal cases involving voluntary associations to which the same common law applies. Members are probably aware that it began with the rather perplexing High Court decision in 1934 of *Cameron v Hogan*—we need to remember that case—that characterised political parties and other voluntary unincorporated associations of purely domestic concern, not justifying intervention by the courts. The court said that such cases were not justiciable. Requiring all parties to incorporate would fix that.

In 1974, the case of *McKinnon*, involving a rugby league club, highlighted the importance of voluntary associations and the importance of protecting the rights of individuals. For decades after, Supreme Courts found ways to distinguish the decision in *Cameron v Hogan* in order to allow aggrieved members to bring disputes. This included the abhorrent case of *Carter v NSW Netball Association* when a group of members created a fraudulent petition to falsely accuse a fellow member of child abuse. That resulted in the member losing her external job and suffering a mental illness. Strangely, the 2022 *Camenzuli* case, which was heard shortly before the 2022 federal election—members may recall that it delayed the last federal election—upheld the decision in *Cameron v Hogan*. The *Camenzuli* decision has reignited the conflict over how the rules of voluntary associations are to be treated at common law. It has also caused a conflict with the Victorian decision in *Asmar*, which found that certain disputes involving political parties were justiciable under the Victorian Electoral Act. At common law, only the High Court can resolve these conflicts. If the decisions in *Cameron* and *Camenzuli* are upheld, people like the plaintiff in the *Carter* case will be denied natural justice. Political parties and their office bearers continue to rely on the decisions in *Cameron* and *Camenzuli*.

When a voluntary association incorporates under state legislation, it becomes subject to standards specified in those acts. In particular, an association is normally required to adopt model rules. These model rules typically enshrine democracy inside the association—for example, by mandating that office bearers are to be elected directly by the members. However, as of 15 March 2023, according to the Australian Electoral Commission, it appears that only four out of 57 registered political parties were incorporated. In any event, state legislation does not prescribe a democratic process for preselection, a process unique to political parties. Therefore, political parties that are incorporated can still avoid the model rules.

The increasing frequency of legal cases involving political parties highlights that current laws are out of date with community expectations. Any person joining a political party has a right to expect that the rules will be binding against the political party and its office bearers, as much as the rules are binding on each member. They would also have the right to expect that the political party and its office bearers would follow the principles of natural justice and other administrative law principles or proper decision-making. Opening up preselection will attract new members to political parties and, ultimately, more capable and diverse candidates. It will also take away “jobs for the boys”, which characterises and determines most preselections. If governments consider that it is in the public interest to regulate the affairs of local sporting clubs, it is self-evident that it would be in the public interest to regulate the affairs of political parties. Current laws, including the Commonwealth Electoral Act, are inadequate to prevent the type of improper conduct I have discussed. This house should consider regulating political parties in WA in much the same way as incorporated associations. Some aspects of that regulation might be similar to those that apply to incorporated associations generally. However, other aspects might be different due to the unique functions of political parties. It is a sad state of affairs that a bowling club is more regulated and accountable than a political party. It is an indictment on this institution in which we sit today and to which we claim to owe our allegiance to allow unelected wire-pullers and unionists inside political parties to dictate and influence the outcomes or lack of outcomes for the citizens of Western Australia.

The first step to finding a solution starts with acknowledging and talking about the problem. I hope that by etching these issues into *Hansard* for the rest of time, someone at some point, now or in the future, will join the fight to save democracy from the hands of the wire-pullers who hide within modern political parties. I will bring to the house a private member’s bill that will require political parties in WA to incorporate. This will overcome the archaic 1932 authority in *Cameron v Hogan* and open the way to making political parties justiciable, democratic and accountable.

I will finish with what I call some elevator pitches on what appear to be necessary and immediate changes in this state. I do not have the means to change these things, but I have started the process of researching them and making attempts to progress them with others in this building.

The return to the state and its people from iron ore royalties has not kept pace with the massive increase in export revenue from iron ore. The people own the minerals and deserve a bigger share. The McGowan government did not act on this. Mr McGowan's friendliness to the mining industry might in part explain why this has not been rectified. It will be of interest to the people whether former Treasurer McGowan will end up on the board of a mining company in this state, in addition to his taxpayer-funded pension, especially given that that path was taken by the previous Treasurer of our state. An improvement in the return on iron ore royalties could be channelled into very worthwhile areas, such as health care.

Just quickly, Your Honour—not "Your Honour"; Madam President—I have some thoughts on housing affordability for those under 30 through the first home super saver scheme. No members in either this place or the other place are under 30. Nobody is doing anything for those under 30. Is there any reason that we could not give every person under 30 who pays tax on 30 June this year and has a residential address in WA \$1 000 from the surplus or improved iron ore royalties, which would go into the federal government's first home super saver scheme? That sounds like a no-brainer to me. Our young people are locked out of the housing market and need something like \$60 000 for a deposit on a home. Housing is the biggest issue for our young people. The generations of people in this state who have benefited from the many housing and mining booms would not begrudge their kids or grandkids a gift from the state government. This would require some cooperation from the Australian Taxation Office, but the amount would go into the young person's superannuation account. Anyone eligible for the scheme can put up to \$50 000 of their superannuation towards a home deposit. This scheme is already in place. If a young person is not eligible for the scheme, the contribution would just form part of their retirement savings. Using the superannuation scheme for this would be a non-inflationary way to spend some of the government's massive surplus.

We must also drop the voting age to 16. People of this age have a lot more invested in the future than us oldies. They are more empathetic, more socially minded and more environmentally minded. If they can pay tax, they can surely vote. A change like this is needed because we continually refuse to address youth issues in this place. Lowering the voting age would shake things up nicely and refocus our attention on these things. I will be reaching out to Emma Heyink from Margaret River in my electorate. Emma heads up the "Make It 16" campaign nationally. I will do whatever I can for Emma.

On the issue of police training and development, the shortage of police officers seems largely to be due to nobody respecting police work as a career—not even by the police. Would a way to address this be to incentivise current and future university students to take at least some policing units in addition to their other units of study? Edith Cowan University has a policing degree. I am sure that the other universities could add at least a few policing, investigation and justice units to their offerings. By doing so, graduates who have a problem in obtaining employment upon graduation might consider policing as a long-term career. The incentive could be that, in addition to undertaking the physical and operational training, graduates could be paid more than a normal rookie who has not completed the policing units at university. I suspect that by attracting quality graduates, the additional pay would be more than offset by improved productivity.

I have appeared many times at the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Other than providing jobs for ex-unionists in a union-friendly environment, I see no reason for keeping the WAIRC. We should refer our powers to legislate on industrial relations to the commonwealth. Why is WA the only state not to do so? The Fair Work Act should regulate the employment of all Australians. It is a much more modern act and, in any case, provides more protection, such as a general protection to vulnerable workers.

On the issue of the Voice, it would be undemocratic to usurp the integrity of the federal Parliament by giving one group, albeit a very important group, special influence with the Parliament. I stand in support of Indigenous leaders Warren Mundine and Jacinta Nampijinpa Price on this. The most sacred institution in our democracy is the federal Parliament. The mechanism for Indigenous representation is already there. We have 11 Indigenous members of the federal Parliament. What we need to address reconciliation is a treaty, not a committee that will undermine the integrity of our Parliament. Having a Voice to Parliament would compromise treaty negotiations. The Parliament already has the power to make a treaty. The Voice would compromise treaty negotiations because one interest group would have a seat on both sides of the negotiation; there would be a specific Indigenous group on one side of the negotiation and another specific Indigenous group called the Voice on the Parliament side of the negotiation. To a degree, the Indigenous negotiators would be negotiating with themselves, leading to a treaty that would be more complicated, expensive and divisive than it should be. I know people who are petrified that the Voice will be a Trojan horse for a form of treaty that will be catastrophic for the finances of this country and for productivity. The Parliament should have unfettered independence to negotiate a treaty with Aboriginal groups on behalf of all Australians, but, instead, it will be compromised by the Voice telling it what a treaty has to be. The Voice is ill conceived, undemocratic and dangerous and the wrong mechanism for reconciliation. I hope that the people of

Western Australia can see that the Albanese government, and even the Cook government, is not being transparent about the damage the Voice will do and I hope that everyone will vote against it.

As I said, I will use my time in this Parliament to do what I can to improve democracy in this state. I thank you for your kindness and I also thank my father. Even if my father's standards were too high, I thank my father for showing me the world and letting me know that we should always strive for high standards, and I also thank him for helping me with my legal costs when I get into trouble. Usually I get in trouble for what starts out as me standing up for myself and others because I think it is right to do so, but Dad was always there for me. I also thank Steve for adopting me as a son and showing me how to love, joke with, and nurture my son.

I am worried about what I can achieve given the huge majority that Mr McGowan has built by politicising COVID and scaring people into voting for him. I know this happened because I made many campaign calls myself to electors linking COVID and “staying safe” to his re-election. I apologise to those electors for using those tactics. It is likely that my grand plans will be hard to implement but I would like to ask my new friends on the crossbench and in the opposition to help me with my proposals. I will help you guys, too. We must try to improve what we can in spite of our minority status. Equally important is the ground work, meeting with electors in the south west, Bunbury and beyond. If I can help one person to be heard and to feel better about our democracy, that is a start.

It is my pleasure to serve, President. I will keep trying.

**HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural)** [3.11 pm]: At the outset of my remarks, I welcome Hon Ben Dawkins to the Council and congratulate him on his first speech to this place. As he said, it is an immense pleasure and responsibility to serve as a member of this Council that I am sure weighs heavily on everybody as it will the honourable member throughout the remainder of this term.

The opportunity to note the budget papers is always a strange approach given that we indeed had the appropriation bills introduced into the Legislative Council, if I am not mistaken, last evening. Nevertheless, it is a good opportunity, particularly with the benefit of a few weeks, to reflect on matters not only related to the budget, but also more generally.

As Hon Peter Collier did so eloquently yesterday, I want to add my condolences to the tragic loss of Constable Anthony Woods. As Hon Peter Collier said, there is nothing we can say that will lessen the hurt and the grief that Constable Woods' family, his colleagues and the broader police community will no doubt be enduring. I can only imagine what that circumstance will possibly feel like for people who were close and those more broadly in the police force.

I also want to reflect on the retirement of Hon Mark McGowan, which by all accounts came as a surprise to most. I always held the view that I would be surprised if the Premier contested the next election. It was always a view that I held privately. I reflect on what has been a significant parliamentary career. I understand that a motion was considered in the other place today that also did that. But also I thought it rather unusual that after serving, I think, some 26 years in Parliament, within just one week of Parliament sitting, the former Premier did not make the most of his opportunity to deliver a valedictory speech to the other place, but that was ultimately his decision to make. The understanding is that unlike members of this place, it is not always the case that members of the Assembly, particularly when they do not choose the time of their leaving, are afforded the opportunity of saying farewell.

I also want to recognise the election of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Labor Party and subsequently the Premier and Deputy Premier of Western Australia in the election of Hon Roger Cook and Hon Rita Saffioti to those offices. Certainly I have had many interactions with both of them over my 10 years in Parliament, but even preceding that. I went back and checked last evening, and I realised I had the pleasure of first meeting Rita Saffioti when both she and I were delegates of the Australian Political Exchange Council in its inaugural delegation to India in late 2010. The delegation was led by the federal member for Fremantle at the time, Melissa Parke. Hon Rita Saffioti had recently been elected. At the 2008 election she was elected as the member for West Swan so she was in her first term in the state Parliament. It was certainly an enjoyable experience to participate with her on that delegation to India.

In the last few days I have also experienced the government trying to reinvent its rhetoric around the transition of power and the narrative of the government. I have certainly heard government members—I am not sure whether this is in the government's talking points—telling the community that, ultimately, Roger Cook was the COVID hero because he was the one who engineered the COVID response and the Premier was simply the government mouthpiece. This is perhaps the mark 2.0 strategy of the government. Hon Roger Cook is the real saviour of Western Australia. Certainly, that is not the way that I would spin it. As I said, 26 years of service, and potentially even longer in public service, is not to be diminished, even though Hon Mark McGowan was on the other side of politics from me.

Another thing that the mind ponders is how long it might take for government members to rewrap their motor vehicles, dispense with their business cards and other stationery items and remove signage from parliamentary

electorate offices adorned with one Hon Mark McGowan. I completely appreciate the link at the last election. From spending some time at early voting centres at the last election, it became quite obvious—I have spoken about this in other debates since the election—that people were voting for Hon Mark McGowan, the then Premier, rather than local candidates necessarily. It was probably the most obvious thing from spending only a few minutes at an early voting centre. I completely understand the benefit of linking oneself to the then Premier, but once elected, it surprised me the extent to which members continued to portray that in the way they adorned their offices, their vehicles and their stationery items. Obviously there will have to be a reframing of that. Potentially, contesting the next election on the coat-tails of the former Premier will not be the advantage that it was in 2021, and it will probably be a good wake-up call for some members. What was also interesting about the election of Premier Cook as Leader of the Labor Party was the dynamic that occurred throughout the course of that week when we saw a series of groupings. I think Hon Ben Dawkins referred to them as sleeper cells. Others referred to them, perhaps more affectionately, as factions, but I thought sleeper cells was an interesting turn of phrase.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Do you have any sleeper cells in the Nationals?

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** No, we have eliminated all sleeper cells and terrorist activities in the Nationals WA!

**Hon Kyle McGinn:** They self-immolated!

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Hon Kyle McGinn and the Deputy Leader of the Government are distracting me.

It was an interesting dynamic that played out. Initially, the United Workers Union, I think it is now called—I get yelled at when I call it United Voice—elected someone else to be the next Premier. There was a flurry of media activity and an announcement that there was a Premier designate, but that was obviously short-lived. I have often challenged members opposite to provide a flow chart. I like diagrams. I would love to see a flow chart of how the sleeper cell network works.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** I am surprised that the last speaker didn't give you one.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** The government refused to allow him to table the document, otherwise we might have got that. Will the member do that for me?

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** You will have to get it through some other nefarious means. It is really not that exciting, by the way.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I think WA today published something online. It listed an up-to-date affiliation of who is who in the government zoo. It identified 10 members of this place, including Hon Jackie Jarvis, Hon Darren West, Hon Shelley Payne, Hon Lorna Harper, Hon Pierre Yang, Hon Ayor Makur Chuot, Hon Dan Caddy, Hon Sue Ellery, Hon Klara Andric and Hon Stephen Pratt.

**Hon Dan Caddy:** You're missing one.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** That is why I need the diagram. Those 10 members of this place are apparently members of the dominant United Workers Union that voted 17–11 in favour of Premier-designate Sanderson. What I want to know is, of those 10, who voted for the Premier? Of course, parliamentary privilege still exists. Hon Peter Collier spoke very passionately about the importance of parliamentary privilege yesterday. Members will have the opportunity, if they so wish, to let us know whether they supported the Premier or the alternative Premier. We still have time for that in this debate. Ultimately, I do not think we will ever know the outcome of that. That period of time gave us quite an interesting insight into the operation of the network that is the Labor Party and the government. I congratulate those who have either continued to hold or perhaps have newly held offices in the executive government. It is obviously a privilege to be a member of this place but an even higher privilege to serve in the executive government. I only wish—this wish is not a partisan statement—that more members of the executive government were appointed from the Legislative Council. I remember there was a time when the ministry did, just for a short time, extend across to the fifth seat when I think Hon Colin Holt was appointed as a minister in the second term of the Liberal–National government. In my view, it would be good to have more ministers to discharge the functions of the government in this house. That is notwithstanding that we have some excellent parliamentary secretaries. Some of them have been waiting very diligently for their time, and I support them in their endeavour.

I want to reflect on something else, just because it happened recently, but it is linked to the change of government leadership. I refer to 9 May. That was the day we considered the Local Government Amendment Bill. Like the Acting President (Hon Dr Brian Walker), other members of this place engaged, I think appropriately, in the consideration of an important, significant and, at times, complex legislative reform. There was an exchange between Hon Dr Brian Walker and the minister in charge of the bill, Hon Jackie Jarvis, that I want to highlight on this occasion. If there was a theme to the way I approached the bill, it was this: how is it that we, as a legislature, intend to hold local government, a subordinate level of government, to a standard that we have not accepted for ourselves?

There were numerous examples throughout the consideration of the amendment bill when it was found wanting, I think it is fair to say. One of those occasions was when we were considering directly electing mayors and presidents in certain categories or tiers of the local governments sector. Earlier in the debate, I had listed a number of issues that I thought were strange, particularly with respect to transparency, registers or directly electing mayors or presidents when we were clearly deviating from the normal practices that we had long accepted as a state government but we were telling the local government sector to do something different. There could be good and sound reasons for that to occur, but on this occasion, on 9 May, Hon Dr Brian Walker said —

It seems that we are offering differing solutions for the same problem—for example, local governments having directly elected mayors. I would not say that is a bad idea, but I would probably guarantee that the government would not suggest that at the next state election the Premier be elected by popular acclaim.

Hon Dr Brian Walker then became distracted by several members interjecting. I cannot quite remember the substance of those interjections or indeed where they came from, but the minister’s reply—I had a laugh at the time, and it is even more pertinent now—was this —

The reform will give electors in large local governments a direct line of sight of the person who will fulfil this important leadership role. At state and federal elections, voters have clear visibility of who is going to be the Premier or the Prime Minister and they have a clear understanding of the parties and the policies.

That was on 9 May. Fast-forward to last week or the week before and it was clear that that line of sight was no longer the line of sight, particularly given that at the last election in 2021, I would hate to hazard a guess, but a significant number of voters went to the polling places and thought they were voting for Mark McGowan. Even as recently as a month ago, the government’s view about the Local Government Amendment Bill was that of course when people go to an election they know the leader they are getting by voting for Hon Kyle McGinn because it is the Leader of the Labor Party. Fast-forward one month and we have a different leader of the government. For a time, there was significant disunity amongst the cells of the government about who the leader should be.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Are you talking about Vince Catania?

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Where did he come from, minister?

Several members interjected.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Sorry; we shouldn’t distract you.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** The minister is! I have a lot to get through and I would hate to misuse my time —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** But I did see Vince Catania in the building yesterday!

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Really?

I must now turn my mind to the budget, and I would like to start by looking at it on a macro level. I note at the outset that this is the government’s sixth consecutive operating surplus; a \$4.2 billion surplus is forecast for 2022–23—the dying days of the financial year we are currently in. I recognise that that is \$2.4 billion higher than what was forecast in the midyear review, not even at budget time last year, so there has been significant uplift in cash and revenue flows to government coffers. The question, as the shadow Treasurer often asks, is: how long will that continue to be the case? There is another operating surplus forecast for 2023–24 of some \$3.3 billion.

On budget day one of the first charts I turn my mind to in the budget papers is the one that appears on page 3 of budget paper No 3, headed “Key Budget Assumptions”. This is interesting, because it is effectively Treasury forecasting where a number of key financial indicators are trending, both in the short term and also across the forward estimates. One of the interesting forecast assumptions is the line “Perth Consumer Price Index growth (%)”, for which the 2021–22 actual was 5.1 per cent. The estimated actual for 2022–23 is 5.75 per cent, and we can see that it is trending down quite significantly across the forward estimates to an average of 2.5 per cent in 2025–26 and 2026–27. It will be interesting to see whether that is achieved, particularly in the context of the inflationary environment we are currently in. There has certainly been a lot of commentary about inflation stabilising or, indeed, reducing in the short term, which has not yet transpired. It will be interesting to see whether that indicator is achieved. This goes to some of the things I want to talk about for the remainder of my contribution to this debate about the impact of some of these key assumptions on households and on the budget more generally and the state government’s ability to respond to challenges over this four-year period.

Net debt is also interesting. I talk about this every year, because when we were in government the then opposition was entirely fascinated with net debt and where it was going. I am not sure who is now responsible for the “debt monster”, but I think someone should call Hon Ken Travers! Actually, Hon Rita Saffioti was also one of the biggest promoters of the “debt monster”, and now she is a Treasurer who is presiding over rising debt. It was interesting to hear, earlier today during consideration of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations’ *Consideration of the 2020–21 annual reports*. Somehow most of a government member’s 10-minute

speech was on the debt of the former Liberal–National government. There were the usual stories about plastic cows and singing toilets; that is about all that member can grasp, but there seems to be a lack of reflection on page 4 of budget paper No 3. One would think that government members would be able to read to page 4 of budget paper No 3; it is not as though this is buried in an appendix down the back. Maybe it needs a diagram.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** The member only needs to get to page 4.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** He is engaging with me!

**Hon Kyle McGinn:** What did I say about cows? I didn't say anything about plastic cows!

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** No, he did not say anything about cows. That was a great, locally driven tourism project, supported by the then government. Of course, we do not know how to unlock royalties for regions over the last six years of this government, unless someone wants to start a microbrewery or a dog wash or something like that.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** What's wrong with microbreweries?

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Maybe a mobile barista service; otherwise it cannot possibly be funded.

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** What's wrong with coffee?

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** What's wrong with beer?

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I turn to the table on page 4 headed “Key Budget Aggregates”. We have here a situation in which net debt is rising. Noting that there are only a couple of weeks left in this financial year to get a few tax deductions, Hon Kyle McGinn, net debt at the end of this financial year is estimated to be \$27.8 billion. I did not go back and check, but that is around the net debt level of the last financial year of the previous Liberal–National government. Obviously that was trending higher, but it was in that order. The projection for the final year of the forward estimates is almost \$36 billion.

**Hon Kyle McGinn:** You just made \$3 billion sound like a little thing!

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** The projection is almost \$36 billion; that is thirty-six thousand million dollars, if that helps Hon Kyle McGinn!

The government is not talking about debt anymore; from its perspective, debt is not an issue. It may not be an issue while we have strong revenue flows, particularly revenue flows above those forecast. The operating surplus is \$2.4 billion above the estimate of the midyear review, so the ship is sailing well; there is plenty of wind in its sails when revenue is above what has been forecast. However, the question is: in four years' time, when we get to 2026–27 and net debt is peaking at \$35.9 billion, will that still be the case? Who knows what the trajectory will be beyond the forward estimates period?

I turn now to page 48 of budget paper No 3. This is another part of the budget papers that I find interesting, and it was actually a feature of Hon Ben Dawkins' inaugural speech—state wages policy. The government still likes to claim that a significant proportion of its financial success is the result of a constrained state wages policy. I have spoken in previous budget replies about the problems a fixed-amount state wages will create in future. It will create future workforce problems, particularly in a tight labour market—which, funnily enough, we are currently in. It will create problems in trying to attract and retain the best and brightest to the public sector, but it will also create imbalances in the salary structures of industrial agreements over time. Rather than giving everyone a percentage-based increase, people are being given cash amounts. Initially it was \$1 000. To be honest, I have lost track because there have so been many state wage policies, particularly in the last 12 months. I think there was a succession of about three of them in three months. I have lost track of the current one and how it is applied. Perhaps there is homework to be done. Looking at page 48—this is an issue that Hon Ben Dawkins brought up in his speech, that we have obviously had a change in the leadership of the government. It will be interesting to see whether or not their approach changes in respect of the state wages policy. We see on page 48, there is a significant number of expired or soon-to-expire relevant industrial agreements with significant cohorts in terms of the number of public sector employees. I accept there are some that have been agreed in principle but there are a significant number that go back to an expiry date of late 2021. They are not even recently expired; they have been expired for some time. It will be interesting to see if there is a change of approach or whether the government will continue its approach with respect to its public sector wages policy. I will make this point again before I move on and that is it is interesting that the government has enjoyed using the mechanism that is requiring the Industrial Relations Commission to have regard to the state wages policy. That was a legislative amendment of the Liberal–National government in its second term. It was ferociously opposed. In fact, I do not think there was another bill—that was in my first term.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Which one was it? The one with the “thing”?

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** No, that was the protesters. This was the one requiring the Industrial Relations Commission to have regard for the state wages policy and the fiscal situation of the state.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** That was not the worst one.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** The minister was one of the main perpetrators in terms of many overnight sittings. In my memory, this was one of the worst, when the government railed against this draconian measure that is the linking of, or the creation of, a state wages policy and effectively, I think in their words, binding the Industrial Relations Commission to outcomes based on the state wages policy and other factors. Certainly, it has had no problem using it. Of course, its argument will be it is to fix the reckless spending of the Liberal–National government and escalating debt.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** You said it.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** We have escalating debt, members, escalating debt, to levels —

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn** interjected.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Sorry?

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** Only if it is arbitrated.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Yes, that is right.

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** It does not affect the state government’s wages policies. The commission must have regard to it when it sets the new minimum wage and the awards. It is not bound to it; it only has to have consideration.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I think it is bound if a matter is arbitrated. If a matter is negotiated and it is arbitrated, I think we will find the Industrial Relations Commission is bound to the state wages policy —

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** To have regard to it but not to necessarily force it. Anyway, it is an obscure industrial lawyer argument.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** We can go through the flowchart as well as the Industrial Relations Commission —

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** I am happy to go through the act for the member.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker):** Members, cross-chamber chatter is pleasant but may not be appropriate just now.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** While I am on budget paper No 3, I want to turn—and I have not even flagged it in my budget—I have just found it: household tariffs, fees and charges, and the representative household table found on page 316, because I think over time there have been different approaches taken and I think there are always ways in which governments represent the estimated impact on the representative household in the way that is favourable to the decisions of the government. One of the things I do keep an eye on, particularly as the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, is the level of collection for the emergency services levy. It is a levy found in the representative household table on page 316 and it shows a five per cent change. Obviously, the ESL is more complex than an average household, but we have to look at the operating revenue tables earlier in budget paper No 3, which shows the actual increases. This year we have seen a 6.1 per cent increase in emergency service levy revenue. That is 6.1 per cent based on a difference from 2021–22. Looking across the forward estimates there are significant increases. The most noteworthy is in the first year of the forward estimates, 2024–25. There is a 7.7 per cent increase in the emergency services levy. Going back to where I started, and this is when we often see higher than inflation cost increases buried in budget papers and this is one example, in the same year, 2024–25, we have Perth CPI growth estimated at 2.75 per cent. We are going to see if that forecast comes to fruition in the following budget, an increase in the emergency services levy of something in the order of three times the forecast CPI rate in that year. This will take me to how we are using that money.

I cannot spend too long on this because an hour is not enough to unpack the budget, but I recognise that we had the appropriation bills introduced last evening. At some point, I am not sure whether it will be before the winter recess or after, there will be an opportunity for members to consider the appropriation bills themselves. Even in a time of debate, I cannot not mention, although I have spoken about this in a recent non-government business opportunity, the procurement of rapid antigen testing in Western Australia. It was interesting earlier today when other members and I were afforded an opportunity to hear from the Auditor General on a number of reports. I think there were six. One of those reports was about the impacts of COVID-19. To refresh members’ memories, the state, using emergency provisions of the Procurement Act 2020, spent \$580 million procuring 110 million rapid antigen tests. What is interesting, and it has taken time to flesh out the facts around this, and there is still some way to go, but we had two agencies involved, the Department of Finance and the Department of Health, which rang alarm bells for me quite early on, but we learnt, I think it was in last year’s budget estimates hearings, when a health official admitted

that there was no methodology. I do not say this in a partisan way, but it is deeply concerning to have a public official admit that the expenditure of more than \$500 million in taxpayer funds occurred in an environment without any usual tendering and procurement processes and occurred with no methodology. Those were not my words; that was the description by the witness.

If members look at the government's response to this, and it is very sensitised to this issue, they will see that it is effectively "Nobody knew about COVID; we had to protect our community and order as many as we could as quickly as we could", which begs the question: Why did it stop at 110 million? Why was the lucky number not 150 million? They are all about to expire. Have we ordered any recently, or do we not need them anymore? They are still being handed out in shopping centres. I was at one the other day and people are still being offered cardboard boxes of them. I am told by the government that a lot of people are taking them, but that has not been my observation.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** I had people come to my office yesterday looking for them.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I still have people come to my office, but at the pop-up in the shopping centre, where they are literally asking people to take 50 at a time, I am not seeing a line of people wanting them. Somebody posted the other day on one of my community Facebook pages that they left a train station in Perth and had been given a box of 500 rapid antigen tests. They had come home with this box and put up a post asking whether anyone wanted some tests, because boxes of 500 were being given away.

Coming back to my point, the government stockpiles will soon expire. If they are still one of the tools in the government's response to COVID-19, have we ordered more? Have we ordered new stock with longer expiry dates? I do not think we have. My original question was: why did we stop it? There was no methodology. If the government's plan was to order as many as it could as quickly as it could, who made the decision, and when was it made, that 110 million tests was enough and that it should stop its internet shopping frenzy because we were done and that was all we needed.

There are also concerns about quality. At the estimates hearing last year I had COVID, and I Zoomed into this chamber for the estimates hearing. I raised the issue of quality. I know that the Therapeutic Goods Administration is fairly late to the party in assessing the quality of the tests being bought, and sometimes sold, that continue to be used. This was one of the issues I wrote to the Chief Health Officer about six weeks ago tomorrow. The stock that I have in my electorate office, but also the stock at my school, no longer has the level of buffer fluid that it once did. Three drops are needed out of a test. I am not sure what has happened, but it appears to be evaporating, which sounds a bit strange because it is in a little sealed container. I wrote to the Chief Health Officer six weeks ago tomorrow. I have not had a response yet. I wrote to the Minister for Health seven weeks ago and I got a response from her chief of staff yesterday, who said that they were looking into this issue.

There is an issue that is a little different from the one raised in estimates last year. The tests that I then felt were reliable are now leading up to expiry, and there is a question over their ongoing quality. I recall the Minister for Environment, Reece Whitby, saying that the government was working on a strategy for the waste and recycling of COVID-19 products. I think that is one of those big issues, because there will be a bulk waste element, particularly from the government warehouses, not to mention people's own domestic residences and businesses. There will be a bulk waste requirement, and hopefully a recyclable opportunity to deal with paper, cardboard, plastic and sometimes hazardous substances. Keep in mind that we were not allowed to send these tests home with primary school children because of the chemicals and the substances in these tests. There is a health risk that I am not sure is known, but also, hopefully, a recycling opportunity.

The other issue I want to address was that in the course of the non-government business debate—during the ferocious defence by the Leader of the House, the Leader of the Government in this place—a regrettable intimation was made that the Auditor General of Western Australia, an independent officer of the Parliament, was a COVID denier. I think that is deeply regrettable. I hope that with the emotions, tempers and interjections in the past, members who were in the chamber on that day have reflected on what unfolded and recognised the extent to which it was improper, inappropriate and unparliamentary to reflect on an independent officer of the Parliament in that way. When members cross the line by criticising public servants, I often hear people come quickly to the defence of said public servant saying how we should responsibly use parliamentary privilege and that it is not a right that should be abused, but in my short time in this place, I think that was one of the more regrettable instances. The Auditor General is an independent public officer, and somebody who I hold in high regard. Her reputation was impugned by none other than the most senior member of the government in the Legislative Council. I think that is deeply regrettable.

The other thing I want to talk about on the government's response—I like to use this line a lot as well—is: "Who could have predicted COVID-19? How would we have possibly known, prepared, thought this was even going to be something that we would have to manage?" It is an argument that, to a significant extent, I accept. Except that buried away in the awful wa.gov.au website is a document called *Emergency preparedness report 2021*, published by the State Emergency Management Committee. Over the course of almost a decade, commencing in 2013, there has been a nationwide project in partnership with the Australian government and every state and territory, that is assessing, understanding, potentially mitigating but at least preparing for the significant natural hazards and risks that



each jurisdiction faces. It was called the State Risk Project. It cost almost \$14 million to conduct it in Western Australia. There was significant engagement from a local level with local emergency management committees, local government, emergency service organisations and public agencies that have an emergency management function. It was a significant body of work and it is summarised in appendix B of this document, which says —

The State Risk Project ... was undertaken during 2013–2021 in order gain a better understanding of the most significant risks facing the State. The outcomes of this work can assist the State Government and LGs to understand and prioritise risk management activities and the development of capabilities to manage high risks.

We have only to turn to the next page and look at the findings. This is obviously a summary, because this is contained in an emergency preparedness report, but the first paragraph under the heading findings states —

The Risk Project found that the hazards of human pandemic and animal or plant biohazard posed the highest risk to the State because they could impact human health, economies, social settings and the environment across the entire State. This assessment —

This was the important bit —

was completed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the forecast impacts have proven to be realistic.

We now know that there was a project at a cost of almost \$14 million over almost a decade that identified that the greatest risk to Western Australia was a human pandemic, and the forecast of the impacts have proven to be realistic. It is interesting because I read this emergency preparedness report. I am not sure how many members would have read it; I do not expect they can read every report the government produces, but it is obviously one of interest to me. When members read this report, they would then want to seek the report itself, which I did in August 2022. It was interesting because in August 2022, I sought access to the state risk report initially through parliamentary questions and later through a freedom of information request. It was August when I started asking for it, and in November, it went to cabinet. How bizarre that this report was canvassed and mentioned, even to some extent detailed, in a public document in 2021; the opposition starts asking about it in August 2022; and then the trolley gets wheeled through cabinet in November with a big red cabinet-in-confidence stamp emblazoned on the front cover and it is buried. This \$14 million product over nearly 10 years was buried in cabinet confidentiality. I think that claim is highly dubious. How a report of that nature could reveal the deliberation of cabinet I think needs to be tested.

Before I move on from the rapid antigen test procurement issue, and I think this often gets missed in the debate about spending like drunken sailors, I will speak about opportunity cost. At that time, in the lead-up to the pandemic, and with the change of government, we saw different priorities. I am sure it is probably a distant memory in most members' minds. We went through a series of very significant budget cuts. We were closing a whole range of educational facilities and functions. The government does not like talking about this either, but there was a whole range of rationalisations going on. Projects were delayed. I recall that we have had so many promises to build or redevelop the Geraldton Health Campus it is now not going to be delivered until after the next election. We put that project on hold because it was going to cost more money than the Labor Party had budgeted for. The Labor Party went to the election saying that it would cost \$40 million; it is now at \$125 million. The project was going to cost more, so the government put it on hold, notwithstanding that that was probably the project that the government could say it does not care how much it will cost, it needs to be built, and the COVID-19 pandemic would have reinforced that. The government put projects like the Geraldton Health Campus on hold because we saw costs escalating. At the same time, we had the Department of Health—the same agency—saying that there is no methodology to RATs and to just keep on spending! The government spent \$580 million on them. It could have redeveloped Geraldton Health Campus at least three times over and still had enough RATs for the community. That is the opportunity cost of these decisions.

I implore members to read the report of Dr Marcus Kennedy, titled *Chief Health Officer's inquiry into aeromedical services in Western Australia*, that was released only last month. This is a compelling report that reinforces what regional members—particularly regional members from this side of the house—have known for a long time, and that is that our aerodrome medical capability is underdone. I have considered this very excellent report that was handed to the government in June 2022. We are now in June 2023, a year later, and funnily enough the week after the budget, it was publicly released by the government. How convenient that the government sat on this report for nearly a year and then a week after the budget decided that it would release it. I suspect, when we get to estimates, the government will say that it was not a matter that was considered as part of the budget process because it was released after the budget. I suspect that that is what the government will say, but this is something that requires immediate investment.

The report recommends what we have known for long time. We only have to turn our minds to page 34 wherein there is a jurisdictional comparison. It is hard to compare Australian jurisdictions, but this table really is helpful. I bet the Acting President will hear this in two weeks' time at budget estimates when the Department of Health is put under pressure for three hours. It will get a bit stuck in a corner and it then start running lines like: “You do realise that we are the largest health jurisdiction in Australia; in fact, we are the largest health jurisdiction in the world. It

is very complex, and we have thin markets and small population centres and they are very remote. You do realise all those challenges that we face.” Then I look at this table and I compare us with Queensland. I have said this before: we are obviously much larger than Queensland. We are about 1 million square kilometres larger in geography, and Queensland has roughly twice the population than us. Queensland has 15 rescue helicopters. South Australia, a close neighbour to Western Australia, has population of about 1 million fewer people than ours. Its geography area is considerably less than ours; it is fewer than 1 million square kilometres, compared with our 2.64 million square kilometres. South Australia has three rescue helicopters, which is the same number as Western Australia.

This report makes some immediate recommendations—one is that a third rescue helicopter should be brought online straightaway. Government can do that because we do have a third rescue helicopter. We are actually using it as spare parts at the moment, so that when one is in for service, we have another rescue helicopter to take its place. Sure, there will be some interruptions to the service, but when events such as tropical cyclone Ellie and Ilsa have occurred we have seen that third helicopter deployed, sometimes for extended periods. An immediate recommendation was to bring that third rescue helicopter online straightaway. The report also recommended the addition of a clinical crew member, medical practitioner, to complement the crew of paramedics. It effectively recommended a doctor/paramedic crew for the existing helicopters and that we should have three helicopters online immediately.

The report went further and stated that there was the case to be made for up to nine rescue helicopters. Recommendation 10 of the report refers to the need to develop a business case and to refine data, which requires immediate funding for that to occur. Remember that this report was from June 2022. If there is ever a time to invest in building a capability like this, it is whilst the government is delivering above-forecast, multibillion-dollar operating surpluses. Do not leave it for three or four years when the risk is that some of those surpluses start to erode as revenue falls away for various reasons, because that will not be the time to do it.

Page 49 of this report is interesting. A special paragraph is reserved for the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. It is a pretty pointed criticism of the department where it states —

On December 7 2020, DFES provided pre-release advice regarding its RW —

That is, rotary wing —

tender process which occurred on February 2 2021. In April 2021 DFES closed the tender process for replacement of the RW and (flight) crew which ultimately resulted in the awarding of a contract February 21 2022 for provision of RW services with a platform change to the highly capable AW 139, a contemporary AMS platform ideally suited to the WA context.

Members would have read the media statement from the Minister for Emergency Services at the time. The report continues —

Although this may be a suitable outcome, —

I emphasise “may” —

it remains problematic that such developments appear to proceed in a vacuum which ignores the potential synergies, rectitude and connections of the RFDS RW acquisition, and the CHO initiated Review of Aeromedical Services (announced some 10 months prior).

It is interesting to then read at the commencement of recommendations the following —

With these changes will come a need for cultural development, different approaches to contractual relationships, and an ability to collaborate around the patient journey in a way that is patient centric and agnostic of organisational competition, power, or influence.

Closing on that point, I have heard too many times those in the department grandstanding about how the rescue helicopter is theirs and that St John Ambulance just gets to fly in it, and here we have, once again, an example of the department acting in isolation from the inquiry, but also without significant regard to the needs of patients. Probably one of the best recommendations in this inquiry is that the department be stripped of its responsibilities and WA Country Health Service allowed to support patients, particularly in regional Western Australia.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Colin de Grussa**.