

WA INVENTOR OF THE YEAR AWARD - ELIGIBILITY OF BEN NEWMAN

Statement

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [9.48 pm]: I wish to refer to one other small matter. During question time today, I asked a question of the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Science and Innovation about the finalists in this year's WA Inventor of the Year Award. I asked questions to which I actually knew the answers. I asked -

- (1) Is it a condition of entry for all finalists to fulfil the following criteria -
 - (a) be a resident of Western Australia;
 - (b) be developing the project in Western Australia; and
 - (c) have a product or idea at the precommercialisation stage of development without an established sales stream?
- (2) Do all finalists in this year's WA Inventor of the Year Award fulfil the above criteria?

The answers to both those questions were yes.

The WA Inventor of the Year award is quite a prestigious award, and it is a very rewarding award in financial terms. The media statement of 16 August from Minister Hon Francis Logan states -

Seven Western Australian entrepreneurs have been named finalists for the inaugural \$250,000 WA Inventor of the Year Awards.

The benefits are not to be sneezed at. The media statement continues -

The Minister said the prize-money would help winners take their innovation to the next stage.

"Winners will receive significant financial assistance and in-kind support, such as access to professional services and resources appropriate to their stage of development and commercialisation," . . .

"The seven finalists in the two categories will each receive more than \$8,000 in in-kind support.

"Winners of each category will receive close to \$40,000 each, with the runners-up receiving up to \$24,300.

"The overall WA Inventor of the Year will receive prizes valued at more than \$100,000."

I understand that the overall winner is to be announced on about 15 September. The seven finalists were named in the minister's press release. One of the finalists is a Mr Ben Newman, and his product is the Brakeboard. It is the same concept as a skateboard, except that it has the added safety of an innovative braking mechanism. That was in the industry category. The criteria are very clear. The web site states -

- o Entrants must be resident and developing their project in Western Australia.
- o Products or ideas must be at the pre-commercialisation stage of development without an established sales stream.

It seems that Mr Ben Newman's company is called Brakeboard. The contact details on his web site are 28 Chaucer Street, St Kilda, Victoria. His registered office is at Guy Pollitt and Co in Leeming, WA. That is the office of a certified accountant. According to Mr Newman's Brakeboard web site -

Brakeboard has been selling product internationally for two years through website advertising.

The web site also states -

The Brakeboard box set has been purchased by riders in the USA, Germany, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, New Zealand . . .

Further, Catapult is an innovation science web site produced by ABC Online. On a page of that web site which is about Ben Newman and which was posted in December 2005, it says not only that he is in Melbourne, but also that he has sold 300 brake sets to riders in Austria, Switzerland and the USA. Further, there is a Private Equity and Entrepreneur eXchange web site on which potential entrepreneurs promote themselves to potential investors. Ben Newman's listing of his company not only explains that the start-up stage has been completed, but also states that a small-scale production has been produced and sold locally. It also lists the location of this product as Victoria.

I say to the minister that, on face value, something does not seem to add up regarding the criteria. It seems either that Mr Newman's credentials are not related accurately in his web site information or that Mr Newman is in fact in breach of the criteria. If that is the case, the answer I received today is misleading.

Hon Kim Chance: I may well have misled you. I am very much aware of that.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I will not point any fingers. I just invite the minister to provide an explanation to this house, perhaps tomorrow or as soon as possible, about that situation.

Hon Kim Chance: Yes, I will.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: From my cursory investigations, it appears to me that there is an anomaly. I know that a lot of very innovative, inventive and clever Western Australians have sought some assistance through that channel. I certainly know of a couple who missed out. If they missed out and somebody else who should not have qualified is a finalist, there is something badly wrong with the system. I merely point out that situation as it exists and invite the minister to make some inquiries and perhaps report to the house, or get the Minister for Science and Innovation to clear up the matter for us.

Statement

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [9.55 pm]: I will respond to the matter raised by Hon Barry House. I thank him for raising it. I will have the matter checked out first thing tomorrow and report back to the house. It is in any case my responsibility to the house to do that, because it seems, on the face of it, that I may have misled the house. However, I will check the facts and, if I have, I will certainly correct the record and apologise for having misled the house.