

MANDURAH VEHICLE LICENSING CENTRE

Grievance

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville) [9.36 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and is about the Mandurah vehicle licensing centre. I know we are not orphans in this state in having a problem with our licensing centres; it is a fairly widespread problem. However, I am sure I do not need to tell the minister that the Peel region is the fastest growing region in Australia and just behind, I think, the Deputy Speaker's electorate.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: That just depends on how you assess that.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Certainly the local council members, comprising some people who are strong supporters of the minister's government, are strong believers that it is true. Perhaps the minister can argue with them.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: It is the fastest in percentage terms but in absolute growth Wanneroo is still ahead.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the minister!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Pipped at the post!

I want to stress to the minister that this grievance is not in any way a criticism of the staff at the Mandurah licensing centre; in fact, anything but. The staff there are extremely dedicated and work extremely hard under enormous pressure. The reason for this grievance is to try to alleviate their burden, not to add to it in any way. I also want to stress that none of the staff has complained to me. One of the major complaints from people using the centre came from the partner of someone who works at the centre. That person expressed dismay at the huge workload under which the partner is working. That person talked to me about some of the issues there, one of which is that people who attend there to see about their licence or just pay their bill have a one and a half hour wait to be served. I went there myself. I took a ticket, went away and came back an hour later and I still had half an hour to wait. The poor girl working at the desk had had no morning tea break, she had about 15 minutes to snatch her lunch and she was otherwise on her feet working through the whole day. Those are totally unacceptable working conditions for public employees in this state. I think the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations require much better management of staff than that. The staff are extremely overworked, there being no replacements for them, and there are no toilets in the building for people waiting to be served. An elderly person or anyone with bladder difficulties or who does not prepare and go to the toilet before going to the licensing centre will be standing in a queue for one and a half hours with no toilet to go to. People have to leave the queue and the building and drive somewhere else to find a toilet. I think the nearest toilet is at McDonald's about a kilometre down the road. People then have to go back to the licensing centre and rejoin the queue. I am told that some of the counters are not staffed because there are not enough staff to serve everyone.

Another issue is the waiting time to book for driving tests. I was just told by the member for Murray of someone he knows who failed his first driving test and had to make a time to be re-tested, and there was a four-month wait. I am told that if people ring up and say they want to make a booking for a licence test, they are told it will be five or six months. Then a little parcel of bookings is released along the way somewhere, so sometimes people can be slotted in. People may say they have been told they cannot get a booking for six months but they are told, "No, there's one in a month", or it may be two months. Little parcels of booking times are saved to farm out along the way.

There is also a problem with trying to get through by phone. I had a complaint from someone about a particular issue. It was handled very well when I finally got hold of a person at the licensing centre, but my staff were half an hour on the phone trying to get through. The staff at the centre just do not have time to take phone calls and serve people at the counter at the same time. Another particular concern is that when all the staff arrive for work in the morning at about 8.15 there are about 40 people waiting at the centre to get in to beat the queue and be served first. St John Ambulance is right next door and a person expressed concern to me about a potential blockage that might occur with all those cars and people being outside the centre. It is not possible to fit 40 cars in the parking spaces and they may block access and egress for the ambulance. I am told at least an extra four staff are required. I am also told the centre was promised at least two staff and thought it was getting two, but suddenly that fizzled out. I do not know what happened, but the centre desperately needs four extra staff. I am told that the Mandurah licensing centre sees about 17 000 customers a year compared to the 13 000 people a year seen by the average metropolitan centre with the same number of staff.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: When you talk about four extra staff, which part of the centre do you mean?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I do not know. I am passing on what was said to me.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: Are you talking about the licensing centre staff or the vehicle inspection staff?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I think it is the licensing centre staff, but I am not positive. Four years ago there was a licensing and vehicle inspection centre at Pinjarra. That was closed and vehicle licensing inspections are not done any more. That centre is open one day a week - I am not sure whether it is for a half day or a whole day - for licensing. The point is there are not enough staff. Peel is a booming area, regardless of whether it is the fastest or second fastest growing area. Alcoa is there and Wagerup is doubling in size. There is a huge increase in the number of workers. There is a booming young population who want to be able to get to work. There is an excellent set up in high school and at TAFE so that they can get trade certificates and get into the workforce. One person needed a licence to get to Alcoa to get an apprenticeship and had to wait to do the test. I notice that in the budget the minister has been allocated an extra \$8 million or \$10 million to address this problem in the licensing system. I want to make sure that minister is aware of Mandurah's problem and that the licensing centre does not miss out. I have spoken to the member for Mandurah, who supports a resolution of the problem and was going to talk to the minister about this issue.

MS A.J.G. MacTIERNAN (Armada - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [9.44 am]: I think the member made up that last bit.

Dr K.D. Hames: No, not true. I spoke to him yesterday.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I have no doubt the member for Mandurah shares the member's concerns about waiting times, but he would be aware that for at least the last two and a half years I have not been the minister responsible for this area. I have raised this on numerous occasions in this place -

Dr K.D. Hames: Minister, don't think this is criticism of you, because it isn't.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: No, but I am pointing this out. I know the member for Dawesville wrote to me and the letters came back from Minister Ljiljanna Ravlich. I just want to get that clear: I am not the minister responsible. The member is correct in saying there are enormous waiting times for service at the licensing centre and an unacceptably long waiting time for people wanting to get a driver's licence. All of these issues have been compounded because massive numbers of people are coming here from overseas. We have put on four additional staff to deal with those people coming in with overseas drivers' licences. The growth in the state has been enormous and a place like Mandurah experiences quite a bit of that.

The waiting times for driver's licence testing have been compounded by the fact that although we have increased the full-time equivalents to four, unfortunately two of those people have been away for extended periods of time due to illness, which has created a particular problem for the Mandurah centre. Minister Ravlich's staff and the senior officers of the licensing division say they are looking at overhauling the whole way in which testing is done to try to deal with these problems, change the basic mechanism and put in place a more efficient booking system. It is true that it appears vacancies come up from time to time on the booking list. Sometimes there are urgent cases when someone needs a particular licence in order to get a job. There is a lot of that going on at the moment, so urgent situations arise and sometimes bookings are given preference. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that lots of driving instructors, basically because it is relatively cheap to do a driving test, put their clients through before they are ready. It is seen as a trial run. While I had responsibility for this some three years ago we put in place a penalty whereby people who did that had to wait a month before they could re-book for a test. I hope that is being enforced. Also, many people were booking and not turning up.

Dr K.D. Hames: The other example I had was a four-month wait to get retested. It has obviously got a lot worse since you were there.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I understand it fluctuates. Our advice is that it has blown out sometimes to 15 weeks, but it can change quite dramatically the following week because people come back from leave or after a period of illness and suddenly there are more people available and customers can be brought forward. It is a rather wildly fluctuating situation. The member is quite correct, and certainly Minister Ravlich and the government have acknowledged there is a problem and a lot more work has to be done. As the member will be aware, there is a \$73.8 million package for improving licensing services over the next four years. Around \$15 million of that is in recurrent spending in the coming budget and there will also be \$7.9 million in the capital works budget. I think the recurrent funding would be of most interest to Mandurah. Part of the work will be enhancements of the transport executive and licensing information system, TRELIS, to get it operating more efficiently so that when people phone in, their calls can be processed more quickly. It is a very reliable system but it is not terribly speedy. Part of this package will provide further enhancements. Additional resources will be allocated to address customer hot spots, including driver assessments. I will ensure that Minister Ravlich receives the details of the member for Dawesville's grievance. After dialogue with the member for Mandurah, she will no doubt ensure that the member's area receives its fair share of the considerable increase in resources that are being allocated.

The vehicle inspection system has changed. Vehicle inspections in the Mandurah and Peel region are carried out by the private sector. There are five inspection centres in the Peel area. The member for Dawesville mentioned

vehicle inspections, but I do not think that they are an issue. The issuing of drivers' licences is an issue. Over the past five or six years, we have been building new licensing centres and installing new technology to achieve better conditions for staff. Fabulous new licensing centres have been built around the state from Broome to Albany.

Dr K.D. Hames: What about toilets?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Toilets are provided at the centres for staff. Normally, specific public toilets are not provided.

Dr K.D. Hames: Some people have had to wait for an hour and a half.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: The task is to try to address that and to increase staff levels. The budget allocations have been made. I will ensure that the specific concerns raised by the member for Dawesville are brought to the attention of Minister Ravlich.