

PERTH BAPTIST CHURCH — PARKING BAY LICENCE FEES

Grievance

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [9.29 pm]: My grievance is to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Transport. I was recently approached by a constituent who serves as the treasurer of the Perth Baptist Church, which is located on the corner of James and Stirling Streets in Perth. He approached me because he had failed over the past 10 years to get any joy from making representations to the relevant authorities seeking an exemption for the church from the licence fees for the 20 parking bays in the church car park. The church car park, like all car parking bays, comes under the ambit of the Perth Parking Management (Taxing) Act 1999. In keeping with this act, the church, which has approximately 90 members, is, following a recent increase, now required to pay licence fees of \$586 per year on each of the 20 so-called tenant parking bays—a total of \$11 200. Members would agree that that is a huge impost on a small church community that already struggles to meet its budget, which is already fully absorbed by salaries and church property maintenance.

The church is registered as a charity under the income tax laws and is therefore income tax exempt. It owns its property. It does not own any other property and has no source of income other than the donations from its members and what is received in offerings from Sunday services.

When the licence fees were introduced, they were fairly moderate and the church made the decision to lease out nine of the car parking bays during the week to a commercial organisation, even though that created some significant problems for it in catering for parking for its weekday activities. Like many churches, the city Baptist Church is not just a Sunday activity church. The church offers a range of services and activities to inner city residents during the week and it needs a car park to undertake those activities. During the week the church operates a special ministry to backpackers and international students, as well as a ladies craft morning. In addition, as a service to the public, it makes its facilities available to the Adult Migration Education Service on four days of the week, for which it receives a very modest rent.

As I mentioned, since the implementation of the tax the church has, as a means of covering that tax, taken to hiring out parking bays to a commercial organisation. Until the latest increase the income generated from leasing nine parking bays was sufficient to cover the tax. As I mentioned, the leasing of the parking bays is creating problems for the church and the increase in the licence fees has created an enormous cost impost. The church cannot lease out more car parking bays without having to close down its weekday activities.

The church wrote to the Department of Transport seeking an exemption from the fees for its parking bays. It recently wrote again to the department and was simply told that the legislation does not provide for any exemptions other than for residential parking spaces and loading zones, which obviously is not relevant to the church's situation.

If the fees continue to be levied at this level, it is inevitable that city churches will no longer be able to function within the area that comes under the ambit of the parking licence fees legislation. It would be a great shame if vibrant churches that offer valuable services to the community were pushed out of the central business district. It would certainly impoverish the life of the city. Often in the inner city it is the poorer people who access the services that churches provide. It would be to the detriment of the wellbeing of the city if churches were forced out of the central business district.

In light of the tremendous social and community services that inner city churches provide to the community, without any cost to the community, I call on the minister to modify the legislation to provide exemptions for churches and other not-for-profit community service organisations that provide public services to the residents and workers in the city.

MR M.J. COWPER (Murray-Wellington — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.34 am]: I thank the member for Southern River for the grievance and appreciate the opportunity to clarify the situation. I draw the member's attention to the Department of Transport's publication titled "Licensed Parking in Perth", and I table a copy of that publication.

[See paper 1182.]

Mr M.J. COWPER: This document is provided to all property owners who may have a Perth parking licence fee liability. It describes how to license bays and, in particular, points to what type of parking activity attracts the parking licence fee or is exempt from such a fee.

Since 1999 property owners within a defined area of the central business district who allow parking other than private residential parking to occur on their property must license this parking and, where the parking is one of

the fee-liable types, pay a certain fee. Fee liability and fee amounts are set by the Perth Parking Management Act's regulation power.

Prior to 1999 a parking licence system operated by the City of Perth was applied to all public parking within central Perth. The city's levy was not applied to private parking such as that on the church site. In 1999 the state took over responsibility for the licensing and extended the requirements to license to all parking other than private residential. This extension to all parking other than private residential created equity between users of public and privately controlled parking in regards to providing financial support for the Perth CAT and free transit zone. For members who are not familiar with this process, I advise that the income raised from parking fees goes towards the CAT buses that operate in the Perth CBD. I understand that annually in the order of 12 million people use CAT buses in the Perth CBD. Members would appreciate that if it were not for the CAT buses there would be significantly more congestion in the Perth CBD.

The Perth Parking Management Act requires that parking bays that are used be licensed and, where required, be subject to a licence fee. Many property owners take out of commission parking bays that they have no use for to reduce their fee liability, which is the case with the Baptist Church. In addition, some owners take advantage of the many types of fee exemptions that are available for uses such as disabled parking or bays reserved for loading or unloading of goods or people. There is no exemption from licensing of parking other than parking that is exclusively for private residential use. There is no exemption from fees to religious or charitable bodies.

Most people or organisations that have property in the area tend to have all or most of their parking bays leased to commercial tenants or to occupants of other sites in the area and draw an income from the parking. Another option that owners can exercise is to reduce the quantum of fee-liable parking. As I have said, property owners are only required to licence for the maximum use on their sites, not the capacity.

In the case of the Perth Baptist Church it is understood that between nine and 11 of its 20 spaces are leased for weekday use by a commercial organisation in the area. This is not an uncommon arrangement. It is understood that most churches and, more generally, landowners in the Perth CBD with surplus parking in older properties lease their parking bays to generate revenue. The legislation controlling the Perth parking fund states that the revenue must be expended within the Perth CBD on projects and services that give benefit and effect to the Perth parking policy. As I said earlier, these services reduce traffic congestion in the CBD by carrying over 12 million passengers per year. There is also a continuing strong demand for these services, particularly during commuting peak times. In the future it is proposed to relieve this pressure and improve services by adding new CAT buses to the fleet. I understand that approximately \$4 million will be allocated to get new CAT buses on CBD roads. The levy will directly support these improvements. The Perth parking levy is one element of a much broader set of policies—infrastructure, service delivery and revenue measures—undertaken by the state government. These measures collectively assist in the management of traffic congestion and ensure that central Perth has a balanced transport system that remains highly accessible to all.

The minister has indicated to the member that a proposal submitted by him would be given due consideration should the member wish to pursue this issue on behalf of his constituent. I look forward to working with the member on this issue to address his suggestion of a possible amendment to the act.