

SHIRE OF AUGUSTA-MARGARET RIVER COUNCILLOR, ALLEGED DEFACING OF BILLBOARD

491. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development:

It is good to see the minister in the Chamber today.

Hon Tom Stephens: It is good to see you too!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: My question is in relation to a recent incident involving a Shire of August-Margaret River councillor wilfully defacing a billboard displayed in a public position. I understand that the minister has been made aware of this matter.

- (1) Has the matter been brought to the minister's attention?
- (2) Does the minister consider these actions appropriate behaviour for a local government councillor?
- (3) What action does the minister intend to take on this matter?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

I thank the member for his question.

- (1) I regret to say that I have not had the matter drawn to my attention. However, no doubt somebody is running around right now trying to make sure that it is drawn to my attention. With a bit of luck, by the end of question time something will be brought into the Chamber to draw my attention to the issue.
- (2) No, it does not sound to me like the sort of behaviour that is considered appropriate for a local government councillor. It appears that it is the sort of activity that some people would call graffiti.
- (3) I will examine the complaint when it comes my way. The whole structure of the Local Government Act, which was passed by the last Government and which we have delivered back to local government, devolves from the Minister for Local Government to local government largely all of the responsibility for almost every issue in local government, bar a few. I am trying to put in place a range of changes to the local government regime that will empower local governments to take disciplinary action inside a framework that is appropriate for that tier of government. That is proving a challenge. However, I have just signed off on the final part of that and sent it to the Western Australian Local Government Association and the Local Government Managers Association. I hope that we now have a proposal with which they can agree so that I can introduce legislation that will enable that tier of government to discipline itself and the activities of local government councillors in ways that are an appropriate response to actions taken by councillors that are outside those envisaged under the Local Government Act. It seems to me that the actions described by the member may well be covered by another statute.