

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [12.41 am]: I move -

That the house do now adjourn.

Dialogue for the Greater Bunbury Region - Adjournment Debate

HON CHRISTINE SHARP (South West) [12.41 am]: I will make a very brief statement this evening, although I appreciate how late the hour is. It is about the reporting of the dialogue for the greater Bunbury region, which was a very important participatory process I attended last Saturday along with various other members of this Parliament. I firstly acknowledge the effort the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, put into establishing that process. It had really excellent scope for participation by nearly 300 people, in considerable detail, in the planning provisions under the regional open space proposals in the draft greater Bunbury region scheme. It involved amazing technical assistance, including using satellite photographs on large screens, which assisted the audience to see how it looks to fly over parts of the region where there are proposals for new conservation reserves. There were all sorts of really clever and innovative ways of assisting a very large body of people to have genuine input into a planning process. I was very impressed indeed.

It is also very well known that the draft greater Bunbury region scheme has generated considerable conflict in the region, as has been reported over a number of months. I have met with representatives of the group that is involved, the Greater Region Action Body, and I have some sympathy for its position, as I said on Saturday at the forum, at which I was one of the speakers. In particular, the owners of the properties that have been earmarked for reservation under the regional open space provisions were not consulted until the public release of the draft region scheme document. These proposals will have enormous personal impact on the lives of the people who own those lands. It was very badly handled and the minister admitted as much at the forum.

One cannot make an overall generalisation, because it depends on the purpose of the particular reservation proposal, but in certain cases there can be a solution via private mechanisms to ensure good outcomes for the conservation of the natural values of this region. That is extremely important because, as I pointed out on Saturday, the area of the south Swan coastal plain, which is largely co-extensive with the area of the greater Bunbury region scheme, is under a very significant conservation crisis. It is a crisis that I have mentioned in this house on numerous occasions in different contexts.

The areas of remnant vegetation in this very rapidly growing region are under severe pressure and not a single one of the 15 vegetation types is adequately protected to meet national biodiversity targets. If we were to reserve all of the remaining remnant vegetation; that is, have a complete moratorium immediately, only three of the vegetation types have even enough left outside the reservation to meet those objectives.

It is well known that this is one of the areas in Australia that is under the greatest development pressure and where the natural environment is at the greatest risk. Therefore, it is very important that the participants put their heads together to come up with solutions to regional open space which meet the concerns of the landowners and fulfil the objectives of a really good long-term sound planning process which, of course, is what a document under the title of a region scheme attempts to achieve.

Members are aware of this background, but I did feel moved to say something tonight because of the remarks in *The West Australian* of Monday, 2 May, the first daily paper after the forum. I refer to the remarks attributed to Filip Guglielmana, the spokesperson for the Greater Region Action Body. The article reads -

“We were disappointed because we believed the Minister was there to listen,” he said.

“The intended objective according to the Minister’s press release in December was, I quote, to discuss ‘the unintended impacts on private property owners from the proposed regional open space zoning in the Greater Bunbury Region Scheme’.

“The format was deliberately structured to not achieving this and was instead set up by the Department of Planning to shore up support for the region scheme.”

The reason I feel I need to comment on that is that it is my understanding that GRAB made a deliberate tactical decision prior to the meeting not to mention areas of contention to the private property owners in that group, of which there were a considerable number. The group had decided, by prior arrangement, that, in the full half-day proceedings, when there was a choice of a short list of regional open space proposals to be considered in some depth, not to put up their problem cases for participatory consultation. I think that was a great error on their part. They came to the table but decided to put nothing on the table. When I read their remarks yesterday I could only come to the conclusion that in fact they are not interested in actually resolving the problems. They are not interested in working with the minister, me, the conservation movement, the government or the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to develop the needs of the region and to constructively move forward together. It

would appear that they do not want to achieve a solution but continue to create as much criticism of the government as they can. One suspects, therefore, that their agenda is, through sheer party politics, to somehow cause the government as much political cost as possible, although I know certain individual landowners have real grievances. I attended that meeting not as a member of the government but with the full intention of assisting with those grievances if I could. I was appalled at their choice of tactics. I was saddened, after I commented about their tactics to *The West Australian* in response to their article yesterday, that the newspaper did publish some of my remarks today but chose to ignore the very important point that members of the group had made a tactical decision not to put the issues up for resolution.

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [12.51 am]: Even at this late hour I have been provoked into saying a few words in response to that little contribution. I also attended the dialogue with the Bunbury group on Saturday, and as you heard earlier, Mr Deputy President (Hon George Cash), I wish I had never been anywhere near Bunbury on Saturday, but the fact is that the dialogue with the Bunbury group was a snow job, an absolute snow job. It was mooted that it was going to be a great talkfest involving 300 people. About 200 attended from the start. When they tried to nominate, the landowners from the Greater Region Action Body were informed that their numbers would be capped. The Department for Planning and Infrastructure had people running around Bunbury and related areas, in shopping centres, signing people up to attend that talkfest which became a snow job. Anybody attending that dialogue at the Bunbury forum would have thought that regional planning was about conservation areas alone and nothing else in the world mattered. The fact is that regional planning schemes deal with a whole range of things and conservation is just one. They include roads, railway access, port access, agricultural land use issues, urbanisation and development potential. All of those things are considered in a proper regional planning process, but this dialogue with Bunbury was promised by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure before the election as her way out of trying to convince the public that she was going to respond to the very effective campaign that had been mounted by the greater Bunbury regional action group, GRAB. Unfortunately, the government won the election, so the process went ahead. It was totally dominated by bureaucrats and Greens. I attended all day, apart from about an hour when I skipped out to attend a friend's funeral, and I was there as a participant, not an observer. I insisted that I wanted to attend as a participant. I sat through the process at a table with two ladies. One was an elderly lady representing some wildflower group from Perth and the other young lady was an arts student at Notre Dame University in Fremantle. Her parents were Bunbury residents and I knew both of them. Her mother had stood as a Greens (WA) or Democrat candidate in a recent election. I did not see her father, but he might have been there also. I could question their eligibility to be there at all. Five people were at the table but it was doubtful whether two of them should have been there. The situation was quite farcical. For Hon Christine Sharp to suggest that the Greater Region Action Body is playing partisan politics is an absolute insult to the group that has had their private property rights directly assaulted.

Hon Christine Sharp: It is disappointing, but it is true.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: They are under siege from the system and from a group of bureaucrats and people like Hon Christine Sharp who speak to them in platitudes and in sanctimonious ways. They pretend they are there to offer them support and comfort but they then turn around and stab them in the back.

Hon Ken Travers: You did not even put anything into the report we spent three years working on regarding these matters.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: What a load of rubbish.

Hon Ken Travers: Now you come in here and you are being grandiose. Talk about giving comfort when it is not due. It is you who does that. It is not anyone else in this place.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: What is the member talking about?

Hon Ken Travers: You go back and read our report from the committee that you and I both served on.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It was our report. I will remind the member of a couple of things. He agreed to a compensation provision whereby land acquisition measures would be introduced under the Land Administration Act, but this government opposed that.

Hon Ken Travers: The government responded to it and provided extra money and increased compensation payments, which your government never did.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The member does not know what he is talking about. He would not have a clue.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): Order! Hon Ken Travers should come to order. He will have a chance to respond in a moment.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: This talkfest was initiated as a response by the minister to the campaign run by the South West Private Property Action Group. That group was given just six minutes on the day to make a presentation. The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure was there also. Hon Christine Sharp was given her own time slot. I was there as a member of Parliament. Why was I not given a time slot? John Castrilli, Dr Steve Thomas and Dan Sullivan were there, too. Why were they not given a time slot?

Hon Christine Sharp: I represented the South West Environment Centre at its request.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The fact is that the event was cleverly orchestrated to produce a result so the minister could tell the public that the government had done what it said it would do. It can now say that it has reviewed the decision and consulted with the public, which, according to the government, has told the government that it is wonderful. The five or six examples presented for discussion were about the conservation of regional open space on public land. That issue is not in contention. That was not even part of the private property owners' beef. Their issues were not raised for discussion throughout the day. The contentious issues, which, in the overall context involves only a relatively small amount of regional open space that is imposed over private property, was very carefully flicked off into the background and was not brought to the fore.

The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, said she was there to listen. During a couple of forum discussions in which she joined the forums, the people in the auditorium asked about only three questions and the rest of the time was dominated by the minister talking at the crowd. She was not talking with the crowd but at the crowd. She was not there to listen at all. She had predetermined attitudes and opinions. She wanted the process to deliver what she wanted it to deliver. She will now claim that it was a good process. The fact is that it was a sham. It was a snow job designed to deliver the result that the minister and her department wanted. Frankly, it was a disgrace.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 12.59 am (Wednesday)
