

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 22 June on the following motion moved by Hon Simon O'Brien (Minister for Finance) —

That pursuant to standing order 49(1)(c), the Legislative Council takes note of tabled papers 3310A–F (budget papers 2011–12) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 19 May 2011.

HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural) [11.30 am]: I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to debate on this year's budget; namely, the 2011–12 estimates of revenue and expenditure. I will commence by acknowledging the excellent contributions thus far of the opposition's lead speaker, Hon Ken Travers, together with Hon Jon Ford, Hon Ed Dermer and, last night, Hon Linda Savage. I was particularly impressed last night with Hon Linda Savage's thoughts on the importance of social infrastructure spending. That is perhaps something we do not talk enough about in this house. I was impressed by Hon Linda Savage's statement that there are few things more important than child health care. I am not quoting the honourable member verbatim, but I believe that was the essence of what she had to say. She talked about the need to view the underlying causes of things such as juvenile crime, and why it is vitally important to focus on the early years of children's lives. If I am not mistaken, Hon Linda Savage said that the core business of government should be to focus very much on social infrastructure, as without cohesion and harmony, the rest would not follow. I hope I got her right there. Hon Linda Savage is spot on in her assessment. There are so many global examples that support such an approach in Australia, and, indeed, in Western Australia. Despite the problems outlined in the member's speech, they are very real issues and we are very much further down the road than in most places around the world. As the member would no doubt concur, we can do a lot better. We must avoid the temptation, however, to rest on our laurels. In relation to last night's interjections, when new governments take on the role or assume the mantle of power after an election win, given the promises made in the lead-up campaign, they have a responsibility to improve upon the past, not just to match the past. That was precisely the point made in this chamber last night: it all has to do with appropriate social infrastructure spending. I emphasise the word "appropriate". I believe underpinning such spending is the requirement for fiscal responsibility. This is the focus of my contribution to the debate on the 2011–12 budget.

I now want to turn my attention specifically to the issue of financial direction. This budget is about politics and not, I believe, the long-term future of Western Australia. It is a budget with no clear financial direction. I contend that it is built on disturbingly false assumptions related to the value of the Australian dollar in the years to come. If the Australian dollar stays where it is now, that will reduce the forward estimates revenue in Western Australia, for example, by something in excess of \$4 billion, all because it is suggested that within the next few years, up to 2014–15, the Australian dollar will drop to around US76.9c. That is a massive and unwise risk to take with the current state of the US economy. In that particular situation, devaluation of the Australian currency appears most unlikely. Many economic commentators have the Australian dollar significantly rising even over the current \$US1.06. To lose in excess of \$4 billion over the next three to four years has the potential to cause great damage to the Western Australian economy. I believe the Deputy President (Hon Brian Ellis) would know the significance of that in his previous farming capacity.

A further problem facing the Barnett government must surely be the issue of GST revenue, or the lack thereof, all because, under the premiership of Richard Court, along with the financial myopia of the then Treasurer Colin Barnett, Western Australia was well and truly stitched up by the state government's own federal colleagues. The legacy of the decision to sign up to Prime Minister Howard's dud GST deal impacts on Western Australians, literally every day. The Commonwealth Grants Commission severely limits our capacity. I know I am speaking to the converted, because we all talk about it, but to put it on record, our capacity to fund schools, ports, roads and hospitals, and the infrastructure required for growth, is a critical issue in this state. The rest of the country relies upon us to lead the Australian economy, yet what happened in 1999 continues to penalise every man, woman and child in Western Australia. Members opposite who interjected on Hon Linda Savage last night questioned what happened when Labor was in power. When we consider what happened in 1999 and the impact that will have in the years to come, unless something can be done fairly urgently, it beggars belief. I would have thought, 12 years later, Premier Barnett and the new Treasurer would have learnt from mistakes of the past. Sadly, this does not appear to be the case. This budget is simply about spending—spending on what the government believes will touch a nerve with the Western Australian people. This is about the sum total of the government's financial and strategic planning. I believe it is simply about opportunistic politics.

I would like to move on to government fees and charges. Government spending comes on top of some of the biggest household fee increases ever witnessed in this state. Water and electricity charges are escalating like nobody ever thought possible. More Western Australians than ever before are doing it tough. The state's lowest paid workers—pensioners, students living away from home and ordinary, everyday mums and dads in this

state—are struggling to make ends meet. We often hear that comment passed. If members go out into their electorates—I am sure every member from both sides of politics does that—they will know that is a common thread these days. That is a huge issue for people everywhere. Disturbingly, the situation will only get worse. The problem will compound in many parts of my electorate, particularly in the Wheatbelt towns of Dalwallinu, Morawa and Carnamah. I spoke to a farmer in Perenjori this morning who was well and truly bemoaning the fact that frequent power outages are a reality for him and his neighbours. In fact, everybody who lives on the edge of the grid endures those sorts of service difficulties.

Before moving on, I will briefly outline the magnitude of electricity tariff problems facing the majority of Western Australians. In three Barnett government budgets, electricity bills have increased by a whopping 57.3 per cent. The average household bill is now in excess of \$1 500 per annum, rising possibly to \$2 000 per annum by the end of the government's financial plan. Two thousand dollars per annum is a staggering figure for electricity. It is hard to imagine, in our two-tier economy, how many Western Australians will cope with such hikes. The sorts of hardships that we hear about on radio, see on television and read in newspapers are a reality, particularly in Wheatbelt towns where maybe there is a drought. Maybe the Australian dollar will go through the roof and the farming community will not maintain the margins required to exist as per usual. What do we do? We still have to pay \$2 000 per annum.

I will now make a few remarks about state debt, given my earlier comments about fiscal responsibilities. I wish to view the issue of state debt in relation to the increasingly serious problem that the Barnett government finds itself in, and the implications for all of us. Let me put it in perspective: at the end of the 2008 financial year, net state debt was \$3.634 billion. That figure has now blown out to something in the order of \$13 billion. By June 2012, the end of that particular financial year, the debt is expected to have grown to in excess of \$17 billion, rising to something in excess of \$22 billion by 30 June 2015. Such increases, averaged out over the next four years, will result in a daily debt increase of approximately \$16 million to the state of Western Australia. That is part of my debt; it is part of members' debts. It is this government's legacy to the people of Western Australia—\$16 million a day. It is a staggering figure and I am sure Hon Linda Savage could find a few child health issues to address if that sort of money were made available to her in a future life. In next to no time, the City of Geraldton—Greenough might even get its much-needed 330-kilovolt powerline. It will take a few \$16 million days, but sooner or later, even Geraldton—Greenough would get there. Such a debt situation is completely unsustainable and, when linked with the borrowings of other states—I think in Australia right now the total figure stands at about \$240 billion or thereabouts—can only place extra pressure on the Reserve Bank to increase interest rates as the economy continues to spend.

Let us put that debt into context. Western Australia's contribution to national debt is the highest per capita amount in the nation. If there are no additional shocks to the Australian economy—this appears to be wishful thinking—the debt may well take in excess of a generation to wipe out, if the borrowing stops now, and there is little chance of that happening. If, as the Premier says, WA is not in a boom, it is hard to imagine why the state's budget bottom line is predicated on boom conditions. It is also difficult to understand that, while the government continues to borrow at an unprecedented rate, first home buyers are encouraged to rein in their spending habits: "Don't reach for the stars anymore. Spend within your means." I wish the same applied to the Treasurer and the Premier. With our approach to excessive spending, the legacy, particularly with phase 2 of the global financial crisis—one need only read the economic newspapers and the commentary around the world to realise that that situation may well prevail sooner rather than later—our financial misbehaviour could be disastrous for both Western Australia and, given our significance in the Australian economy, obviously for Australians at large. In fact, national commentators believe that when, not if, there is a blow-out in worldwide debt—I am not sure what the exact figure in the USA is, but it is in the trillions of dollars and increasing at an exponential rate—and countries are forced to reduce borrowings, the likely impact on the Australian economy will be significant.

To put world debt levels into some sort of perspective, the crucial player is, of course, the USA where debt stands at something like 300 per cent of GDP. They might refer to it as GNP in the United States, but our figure here is GDP. Others of concern are countries such as Japan, whose debt stands at 471 per cent; Britain, 466 per cent; and France, 323 per cent; not to mention some of the world's basket cases. If the Great Depression is anything to go by and belt tightening is required, we can expect it to take anything from the next six to seven or more years for the world's premier economy to reduce its debt to GDP ratio by a measure of 25 per cent. The crucial point in all this, and the implications for Western Australia and other export-oriented Australian states, is that the consequences will be significant, and we will be impacted.

Already, tight monetary policy exists in Australia and it will get tighter. Interest rates will rise as it becomes significantly more expensive for banks to borrow money. Remember, the state government is also borrowing and spending well beyond normal. Western Australian households will need to reduce debt, particularly given the asset prices; namely, the family home. These are obviously going to continue to decline in value. With the subsequent contraction in domestic expenditure—household and investment expenditure—and a greater focus on

savings, economic growth will suffer. Western Australians will be increasingly more exposed to the world situation with export incomes and investment expenditure very much on the decline. Despite the obvious strength of the Chinese and Indian economies and their capacity to deal with issues such as inflation, the message for most Western Australians is that we will be doing it tough. If the world situation worsens and the state government cannot necessarily address its expenditure issues and de-leverage, runaway debt will be the natural consequence of that.

The only solution appears to be a debt-reduction plan focused fairly and squarely on, of all things, privatisation, particularly if further physical and/or social infrastructure spending happens at the rate it has been happening. The only problem is that we will have to outdo even the very best or worst efforts of people such as former Premier Kennett in Victoria to have any chance of survival. We surely do not want to go down that pathway. Can members opposite see it? They would go to the Western Australian public before the next election, because that is what will happen, with the message to constituents and voters that debt is too high, we have to provide jobs, we need new infrastructure to provide those jobs, and we cannot continue to borrow because that would be irresponsible. We have to privatise. Let us start by selling the TAB. That was mooted in the press not so long ago. What about Fremantle port and Synergy? Then there is Western Power, the Water Corporation, and hospital support service centres across the state. What else can Serco run? How will the state benefit? It simply will not. The government will have backed itself into a corner. Service delivery as an indicator—one need only give consideration to things such as prisoner transport—will continue to deliver second best. This pre-empts what I will say about our grain freight system, but look at what has happened in the Wheatbelt with the state of our grain freight system. We are now at the point of abandoning our farmers, the very people who can contribute to the productive capacity of this state.

This budget is also notable to the many Western Australians who have been abandoned this financial year and for the promises that have been broken. I will mention a few: the government campaigned on the need to keep Royal Perth Hospital. It said that it would build a railway line in the same term, with a former shadow minister saying that construction would start this term. The local member was not backward in coming forward with his support of the proposal. Interestingly, it now looks as though he will lose the very part of his electorate that is dipping out. This is the Barnett government's third budget with nothing for the railway proposal. I suppose three for nought is not a bad figure. It certainly will not be built before the next election. Then there is the Bunbury–Albany gas pipeline. I think I might be sticking with gas bottles somehow! There is also the issue of the government's broken promise on the gross feed-in tariff for solar energy. Now we have a net feed-in tariff rate of return reduced to 20c a kilowatt, a far cry from the 60c that existed previously. What about the promised dedicated drug-bust buses? Then there are the school-based police officers. Who would forget the \$13 million proposed spend up-front on suicide prevention strategies? That is just to mention some of the government's broken promises.

I would like now to turn specifically to issues that prevail in my electorate, the Agricultural Region. In particular, I would like to mention the lack of the 330-kilovolt transmission line from Pinjar to Geraldton, tier 3 railway lines, GM canola and issues associated with Aboriginal education.

Pivotal to the success of the Mid West iron ore development is the provision of a substantial energy system, particularly given the extra money needed to process magnetite and the enormous reserves available in the Mid West. It is logical that any pro-development government would seek to assist the growth of that particular industry by ensuring that there is a sustainable, reliable energy system, but, alas, Mr Deputy President (Hon Col Holt), as you would know as a member of the National Party, that is not going to happen for a while yet. For the second year running, the state budget has failed the Mid West in funding for the 330-kilovolt transmission line from Pinjar to Geraldton. There is nothing in the forward estimates—no commitment whatsoever. I think it amounts to a certain sameness. When last year's *Budget Statements* are compared with this year's *Budget Statements*, there is a matter of a few million dollars in administrative costs, and that is about it. The government simply refuses to deliver on any attempt to upgrade the region's power supplies and to provide what industry and everybody else is demanding.

The City of Geraldton–Greenough, the Mid West Chamber of Commerce and Industry, small businesses wishing to expand and the general public have for some time now been seeking reassurances from the Barnett government that the Mid West and, indeed, Oakajee are a priority. Sadly, they have been disappointed; they have been let down again. The local member has been at pains to say that the government will act when and if the time is right. That time is now. In some respects, after speaking to the City of Geraldton–Greenough, the bird may almost have flown. There are a number of significant development initiatives ready to go in Geraldton and the Mid West, but with a limited energy supply, they simply cannot start. As you would very much appreciate, Mr Deputy President, businesses are not prepared to go in unless the government has the capacity and energy to do exactly that, and this government does not. The City of Geraldton–Greenough will say that there is no more excess capacity in the system. For at least the previous two summers, there have been serious power outages as

an overloaded system battles to cope. I have mentioned the nearby country towns. They certainly have enormous problems, particularly for people who run a small business or a horticultural business, as happens in the Mingenew shire. There are significant problems in that regard. The 330-kilovolt transmission line would also offer Geraldton and the Mid West the capacity to deliver on its substantial renewable energy capacity, but that is not going to happen either. With appropriate 330-kilovolt infrastructure in place, the rest of the state can benefit greatly from what can be supplied from the Mid West region. The government simply does not have the commitment and capacity at this stage to get involved in the renewable energy sector and, as such, Western Australia as a state misses out. As I have indicated, in relation to the Mid West's capacity to supply renewable and sustainable energy to the rest of the state, the bird may well and truly have flown.

The region's mining industry stands ready to deliver much to the Western Australian economy.

[Quorum formed.]

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: As I was saying before that little interlude, the region's mining industry stands ready to deliver much to the Western Australian economy, and the government's refusal to promote the energy requirements of the Mid West is disappointing and lacking in vision for the emerging demand for energy in the region.

I took the trouble not so long ago of speaking to the Shire of Chapman Valley, within which, of course, the Oakajee development is proceeding. There is no more staunch an advocate than the Shire of Chapman Valley, which is north of Geraldton, for the promotion of this 330-kilovolt transmission upgrade. Consultants WorleyParsons offered as its solution to the Mid West region's future needs some infrastructure priorities in a report prepared in December 2010 for the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia and the Geraldton Iron Ore Alliance. Its report states —

Demand issues in the region need to be carefully monitored. Many of the resources projects in the region are energy intensive and require substantial infrastructure. Oakajee port will also be a major energy user and will have an impact on future regional energy demand. There are relatively long lead times for linear infrastructure to be planned and this needs to be taken into account in future demand projections.

That is something that the local member is not prepared to acknowledge —

Most of the emerging projects in the more remote parts of the region will rely on self supply of energy. This will lead to a number of diesel fuel based generation systems at each of the minesites. The future establishment of major magnetite projects in the region will lead to substantially increased energy demand in the region. In turn this will cause a wider range of energy options being examined. This includes the use of gas from the Dampier to Bunbury gas pipeline and its spur from Geraldton to Windimurra and the Goldfields gas pipeline. The capital cost of constructing gas laterals from each of the major pipelines is high and requires a commensurate level of energy demand and long term projects to justify the cost. Expansion of the DBNGP is a relatively simple technical matter, as incremental capacity can be achieved by additional looping and compression. However, incremental expansion requires sufficient new contracted capacity with a 15 year undertaking to underwrite the expansion. Expansions have typically been of the order of 50 to 100TJ/day

It can be argued that there is a need for a regional energy solution to the Mid West region's future needs. There are some vagaries of future energy demand but the solution is not in regarding each project in isolation —

This is a most important point —

but as part of a larger network of electricity and gas infrastructure. The real issue is not planning adequately for emerging demand and having an energy deficit in the region based on poor forecasting and a resultant lack of infrastructure.

That is the crux of the issue. This government needs to get its act together and do something specifically about that resultant lack of infrastructure. The ball is well and truly in the government's court. There is a well-held view in Geraldton and the Mid West that the Barnett government has let the region down.

I want to give a few quotes from *The Geraldton Guardian* of 23 May, and in particular from the CEO of the Mid West Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bill Headley. He referred to the budget sticking point for Geraldton's business and civic leaders being the omission of funding for the 330-kilovolt power transmission line from Eneabba to Geraldton. The article states —

“I would have liked to have seen a firm commitment on the 330kV line from Eneabba to Oakajee,” Mr Headley said.

“The chamber is of the view — as are key stakeholders — that the line should go not just to Geraldton but to the 6000 hectare Oakajee heavy industrial estate.”

He said investment in industrial infrastructure would help the State take the pressure off metropolitan areas, create jobs and stimulate other sectors of the Geraldton and Mid West economy.

Mr Headley said the Government had also neglected to commit to providing social infrastructure — schools, hospitals, roads and water — for an expected doubling of Geraldton’s population in the next five years.

“It’s a sensible mid-term Budget, but from a development of infrastructure perspective I was disappointed,”...

I could make many more comments about that but time is at a premium, so I will move on from the 330 kilovolt powerline issue. However, members opposite should be left with no doubt whatsoever about the urgency of that requirement. Despite the answers that we get on this side of the house from the minister from time to time, it is pretty obvious that business wants that capacity. Businesses do not want it tomorrow and they do not want it in two, three or four years when, as the local member says, it is necessary; they want that capacity now.

Hon Peter Collier: There is provision in the budget for the first tranche; you know that, don’t you?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Just quickly, minister, because I am only about a quarter of the way through an hour-long speech. The first part of it, fine, that is a start, but there was a promise in the previous budget that money would be spent. There is urgency. I talk to industry and business leaders and people in metal fabrication factories and they all say the same thing. I have never run a metal fabrication factory, but I have been a member of various chambers of commerce and I know the sorts of things that businesspeople want. This government needs to be more proactive rather than reactive. I am sure that the minister is the sort of person to deliver that.

I move to the issue of tier 3 rail lines. This issue really has divided communities in the Wheatbelt. The push to put more and more grain onto the already underfunded and hard-to-maintain local and state road networks is causing much concern in Wheatbelt communities. Federal and state government support for the grain rail network in Western Australia will be delivered. That is the good news, especially the \$135 million commitment made, albeit some time ago, by the commonwealth government. That investment secures the future of critical infrastructure for parts of a nationally significant industry and gives some growers—some, not all—in WA better access to a long-term sustainable grain freight system. A number of regional communities will have no investment in local rail infrastructure whatsoever. The problem is that unless some level of investment is provided for tier 3 rail lines, local governments will find it increasingly impossible to sustain, let alone develop, local roads to cope with the huge movement of grain by truck. This year’s state budget does absolutely nothing to alleviate the concerns of the now 18 Wheatbelt shires which, with the Western Australian Farmers Federation, have formed the Wheatbelt Railway Retention Alliance, I think in 2010. The alliance’s bid to keep as much grain as possible on rail to stop local roads being swamped by the movement of grain trucks appears somewhat doomed. Therefore, the safety of Wheatbelt communities and the capacity of those 18 local government authorities to maintain local road systems appear to be something that the government is prepared to ignore at this stage.

Hon Simon O’Brien: Did your government ever consider this matter?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I will tell the minister this much —

Hon Simon O’Brien interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: No; the minister asked the question. As I said to the Minister for Energy, I have only about 25 minutes left to speak. In 1999, the minister’s government went to the people of Western Australia and privatised the grain freight system and since then the system has gone broke. No money has been put into the system because the responsibility for rail was taken away from the state government. That is my understanding of it; I might be wrong. I would like to have a chat with the minister afterwards because I am sure that he has plenty more to say. At the end of the day, the privatisation of the grain freight system failed the people of the Wheatbelt.

Hon Norman Moore: So why don’t you take it back again?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Leader of the House —

Hon Norman Moore: Nationalisation!

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: The fact of the matter is that the privatisation of the grain freight system stitched up the Wheatbelt. That is the bottom line.

The minutes of the WA Farmers Federation Merredin Zone Council meeting held on 11 February, which was attended by Hon Mia Davies and Hon Philip Gardiner, paint a rather gloomy picture for grain transport. People at the meeting questioned the strategic grain network committee's report inasmuch as it ignored the long-term efficiencies of rail. Members present maintained that figures for the road transport of grain were either incorrect or had completely underestimated the full costs and requirements to upgrade and maintain those networks. The meeting was informed, for instance, that \$10 million for the Quairading–Cunderdin road “is ludicrous, it is a shocking road”. The Quairading representative at the meeting stated that the preference is for the Quairading–York road to be upgraded if road transport for grain is adopted. I will mention a few more observations made at that meeting. The minutes states that the Kondinin representative said —

\$90m will not fix the Brookton Highway — it makes economic sense to fix the rail. A big mistake was made by the Court Government.

The Bruce Rock representative simply said —

The money for roads at the moment is just a token ... Is the Government going to be responsible for putting trucks onto roads which are not constructed properly? We need fully costed fully engineered roads. It is a terrible waste of money to patch up roads which will not last.

The Bruce Rock delegate also indicated —

The true cost of road is more than rail. Local Government would have to resort to access fees for trucks. Funding has been missed out completely for some roads.

That is, in tier 3 rail areas. The Bruce Rock delegate continued —

Roads cannot be brought up to standard before closure date for rail.

The Corrigin situation is similar to those already mentioned. The Corrigin representative said that there is already a huge backlog of maintenance on roads and that all costs will be borne by local government. I think that situation also prevails in Narembeen. The Corrigin representative also pointed out that road safety concerns had not been included in any consideration.

Mr Bill Cowan, chairman of the WAFF Merredin Zone Council, pointed out that a subsidy is required for the Brookton strategy to work. Mr Kevin Jones closed the discussion by bemoaning the fact —

... that there has not been any capital expenditure on Tier 3 lines; —

He did not provide a time frame —

the solution is quite easy the Tier 3 lines need some dollars spent on them.

Hon Simon O'Brien: If you spend those dollars on them, who is going to use them? Why would you spend millions on something that is not going to be used if it's there?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: No doubt the minister has been out there and spoken to people as well. He should speak to the people whom I have spoken to, including the people I have just mentioned. They will tell the minister that they will use the rail network.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Are you going to pay more? They're going to pay more to put it on rail—sure, they will!

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: The minister keeps interjecting, which is fine to a certain extent, but I can tell the minister that I speak to these people and that is the assurance I get. The minister needs to understand that these rail lines were left in a state of disrepair. What does the minister expect people to do; risk life and limb by using them all of a sudden? The long-term viable future is not road, it is rail. The minister should drive on some of those roads when a school bus is going past a road train.

Hon Simon O'Brien: The people you're talking to are sending those trucks there and they'll keep doing it.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: That is the prevailing situation. If infrastructure spending was applied to rail —

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Mr Deputy President, I will quickly finish; I have only 20 minutes remaining.

Money should be spent on rail because it is more efficient. There is a long-term future in rail but not in roads because the cost relativities are completely blown out of the water. We can only hope that the government will reconsider funding tier 3 rail lines, possibly in the wake of the decision by Co-operative Bulk Handling. The consequence of line closure should be obvious to all of us. Increasing road usage by heavily loaded trucks will have the effect that roads will deteriorate rapidly, costs will escalate and the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and

other road users will be compromised. Accidents and deaths, as they are now, sadly, will no doubt be an increasing reality. The only saving grace may be a commitment by CBH to spend —

Hon Jim Chown interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Honourable member, the only saving grace may be the commitment by CBH to spend \$175 million on locomotives. Maybe with increasing pressure from more shires joining the Wheatbelt Railway Retention Alliance, the government will commit to more funding for tier 3 lines, but that certainly does not appear to be the case at this stage. One can only hope, because it is increasingly obvious that —

Hon Jim Chown interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: The member is certainly welcome to spend an hour on his feet. I would like to hear what he has to say about all these sorts of issues, because I do not believe line closures can be justified.

One can only hope for this funding, though, because it is increasingly obvious that in the medium to long term, rail is the only viable option. However, the rail system is rapidly falling into disrepair, just as the roads will. The issue is, however, that the roads will deteriorate more rapidly. The trouble is that the 2011–12 budget offers no comfort for farmers no matter which transport option is provided or funded.

I now want to move to the issue of genetically modified canola, which is a very contentious issue in parts of the Agricultural Region. This issue blew up some time towards the end of last year. The Kojonup property of a farmer by the name of Mr Steve Marsh became contaminated from a neighbouring GM canola trial, proving a financial disaster to his organic cereal business. This was always going to happen. More than 50 per cent of farmer Marsh's property lost its organic certification because of the contamination caused by seed and plants carried by wind and water from a next-door neighbour's trial, which was promoted by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Terry Redman, and the Barnett government. The result of the contamination has been disastrous for Steve Marsh. His farm's organic status and livelihood have largely been destroyed. The farmer's only recourse now is to take legal action against his neighbour or to seek some sort of compensation from the state government. The situation in Kojonup has the potential to do in Western Australia what has happened overseas, particularly in Canada, where bitter legal battles have divided rural communities and sent many farmers broke.

Monsanto, the company responsible for the GM technology, has continued to insist on no-liability agreements with participating farmers, meaning that farmers such as Steve Marsh, despite declaring themselves GM-free and taking every possible precaution to safeguard their businesses, now find themselves in financial and funding limbo. When I last spoke to Steve Marsh, he had heard absolutely nothing from the minister. I trust that situation has changed in the last few months. Minister Redman's behaviour towards the protection of farmers such as Steve Marsh represents an appalling abrogation of responsibility by denying similar farmers the freedom to choose to grow a non-GM product.

Commentary on the website stevemarshbenefitfund.com.au sums up the minister's compromised approach to the GM issue —

In an appalling abrogation of responsibility, WA Agriculture Minister Terry Redman has followed Monsanto's lead in blaming the organic certifier for Mr Marsh's losses. This demonstrates the extent to which the minister is an advocate for multinational chemical companies before he is a defender of WA farmers. The property rights of farmers have been trampled in Monsanto's push to infiltrate and further dominate Australian agriculture. Mr Redman has merely stepped aside and allowed this to happen. In a statement by Mr Redman —

Members should take note of this —

“.... zero per cent thresholds are unrealistic in biological systems”. Yet on 11 March 2010, when announcing an end to the GM canola ban, he said “the trials proved GM and non GM canola can be segregated and marketed separately. Approximately 22 shires (including 5 out of 8 shires in Redman's electorate) declared themselves GM free zones, as Minister Redman earlier said he “would honour the wishes” of communities to wanted to remain GM Free. He later reneged on that promise, saying to a group of farmers from Williams who wanted to declare their shire a GM free zone “if I do that for you I would have to do it for everyone”.

That is leadership?

It is little wonder, then, that after the problems with GM canola there is no desire for the Barnett government to go down the GM wheat pathway. It is a pity, though, that farmers such as Steve Marsh will have to bear the cost

of the government's poorly planned and failed foray into GM technology. So help me, the issues associated with GM canola are now not going to go away! The genie is well and truly out of the bottle. Situations such as the one that Steve Marsh finds himself in are going to continue.

I will be perfectly honest: I do not mind the idea of GM technology. In my other capacity as a wine producer, GM technology is available to me. But the fact is that one particular person who at the very start of all this litigation declared himself "certified organic, GM-free" has had his whole livelihood taken from him. I have visited his farm. I have looked at where the plants have blown to. I have looked at where watercourses have caused grain to go downstream and get lodged on this particular gentleman's property. It is no fault of his own. All we are told now is that industry should accept some level of tolerance. I am sorry; that is just not an issue here. This particular gentleman deserves to have his rights protected, and those rights have not been protected.

I now switch to a social infrastructure issue—that is, the issue of Aboriginal education. It is an area that I have been particularly active in over many years. It is an issue in the regions but it is also an issue in the metropolitan area. The adequate and appropriate provision of educational opportunities for Aboriginal students is vital to the maintenance of some sort of equality in our world. The reason for such inequality stems from the historical failure of our education system to cater for kids who either do not have the greatest attendance record—truancy is often a problem for these sorts of students—or underachieve, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

The figures get worse as a child gets older, as evidenced by recent National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy test results. Only marginal improvements in the results of Aboriginal students seem to be occurring overall. The question then is why these figures are going the way that they are going and what can be done about them, particularly given that in this day and age we pride ourselves on having a well-funded education system. I am afraid that that is not the case. Why is this occurring? In particular, why are students not attending school? This is perhaps a budget directive for the minister. Without acknowledging that students are not going to school and that they are truanting, there will not be the mechanism at school or at the district level to address these sorts of problems and to incorporate some sort of meaningful funding into our education system, and the causes of non-attendance will remain.

I will quote again from a document from the Australian Government's Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Studies titled "School attendance and retention of Indigenous Australian students" in which comments are made about the causes of non-attendance. Under the heading of "Parents and carers", reference is made to parentally condoned absenteeism with parents failing to accept their legal responsibilities. Under the banner of "Society", reference is made to inadequate welfare support practices, especially in the early years of schooling, which is certainly a message for governments. That was a point that was taken up by Hon Linda Savage last night. Under "Schools", reference is made to poor teaching. No doubt with the move towards privatised public schools this trend —

Hon Peter Collier: Independent public schools!

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I am sorry, minister. I have privatisation in the back of my head. The independent public schools approach means that it is increasingly difficult to get quality teachers to some of these schools.

Hon Mia Davies interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I will have a discussion with Hon Mia Davies at another time. I will be holding discussions all over the place at this rate! I do get out and about and I know what I am talking about in this respect.

Hon Mia Davies interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: If the member wants to talk to me about that, we will do that after. I am not for one minute saying that the quality of teachers in Western Australia is anything but good.

I believe in many instances that, for Aboriginal students, the curriculum is unsuitable. This document refers to self-esteem issues associated with the students. Under the heading "Education jurisdictions", reference is made to inconsistent policies and practices of local schools, and to differences between jurisdiction and schools' policy documents on attendance. Under the heading "Local economy", reference is made to local unemployment, poverty and poor communication facilities having an impact on kids and their capacity to go to school. Cultural diversity can also be a factor with differences between boys' and girls' aspirations causing a problem in many regional and remote schools. Under that same banner of "Cultural diversity", reference is made to the rise in the number of disaffected youth, and the presence of a gang culture in certain areas. Increasing antisocial behaviour makes it difficult for many students to attend school regularly. I would also suggest that the final point made in this commentary headed "Research" is that there is too little evidence of good practice in many instances, but

especially little improvement in overall attendance figures despite a range of initiatives over the past 20 years. Those sorts of comments focus on the need very much to rethink how we are addressing issues of Aboriginal education.

There are a number of other issues in the home environment that need to be looked at. We also need to look at the distances that students have to travel to school, and the education levels of some parents. That is very much an issue that cannot be changed overnight.

I have a number of additional points to make on the reasons for non-attendance at school, but I will go on to what can be done because I am rapidly running out of time. The real issue is what we are doing to address the unacceptable gap between the achievements of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. I put these questions on notice after the budget estimates hearings on education. The budget does not explicitly address this issue, which is the reason for putting those questions on notice to the minister.

NAPLAN runs across years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The average figure for the number of Aboriginal students who achieve the NAPLAN standard is 60 per cent. How can we move a group of people forward, if that is going to be the legacy that previous Labor governments or the current conservative government leave to the people of Western Australia? I put it to members that all of us need to look seriously at how we address those issues. It is time to think outside the square.

What are we doing to get the attendance rates up? We need to focus more on community policing. As a former teacher-administrator, community policing was a great way to get kids to school—although it did not look too good when the local police turned up to suggest that a couple of kids accompany them in the police vehicle to the local high school and questioned them on why they were not at school. The sort of support that can be given through community policing is imperative. Truancy officers appear to have disappeared. Do we have enough teachers with high expectations of Aboriginal students? Do teaching staff have a strong connection with the Aboriginal communities and the schools? As a society, we need to do more to encourage Aboriginal teaching staff—I know that it has been done to a certain extent—and we also need better mentoring schemes. I have asked for information on that through the budget estimates hearings.

The significant issues that I have mentioned today, namely, state debt, energy, tier 3 rail freight and genetically-modified plant technology, together with the social issues of Aboriginal education, are indicative in many respects of a state government that has its priorities wrong. Sadly, in areas of Aboriginal education, tourism, Oakajee, water charges, small business development and the like, the Barnett government is struggling. This government appears incapable of addressing many of the problems confronting rural, regional and remote parts of Western Australia. Royalties for regions has delivered in a number of instances, but it has not evolved into the system that was initially intended. Social infrastructure spending is one example of just that.

I will conclude on comments about the state's potential second economic powerhouse region, namely, the Mid West. As I said before, a number of businesses that I have been in contact with are doing it tough. They should not be experiencing the difficulties that I have observed. Metal fabrication and engineering factories do not have the work to provide employment for skilled local tradespeople. Although we are doing some good things in training—I do not doubt that for one minute—there are no jobs for these kids. Businesses in the Mid West are suffering at the hands of industry from overseas and interstate, and even from the Pilbara area, which is taking up the surplus of these trained kids from the local communities, particularly Geraldton. The region's youth can stay in the Mid West and get a job selling hamburgers, perhaps—that does happen! In the meantime, businesses that may have up to 200 metal-trades workers are sending employees to places like Port Hedland, and sooner or later business investment decisions may see the end of many productive enterprises such as those I have been in contact with recently.

The future of Western Australia's Mid West is important for the entire state, not just for the mums and dads there, but also for the businesses and the workers of the region. I would suggest, in concluding, that the Oakajee project needs to be moved on.

A member interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Well, someone has to do something, member.

The mining industry is seeking assurances that investment in the region will deliver the necessary returns. Hopefully, the Square Kilometre Array project will come on board. I know everybody is hoping for that, and if it happens, maybe that could take up some of the slack in the employment of trained apprentices. Planning for significant population growth is an imperative—I do not know if that is happening at this point in time. I simply conclude by saying that at this point in time the ball is well and truly in the Barnett government's court.

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan) [12.30 pm]: I welcome the opportunity to make some comments on the 2011–12 budget. Most of my comments will be related to the area of mental health and its budget. I have some concerns about other policy areas, but I probably will not get to them.

Quite clearly, there will never be enough funding for mental health. We know that the number of people in our community who have mental illnesses and problems is growing all the time and will, no doubt, continue to grow; looking at the forward estimates, clearly the funding does not cater for the extent of that growth. Some \$527.9 million has been allocated, most of which is for the purchase of services, which is primarily the key function of the commission.

I want to make some comments about the government's five-point mental health policy agenda that it started at the last election. It committed to appointing Australia's first Minister for Mental Health, which it did. It committed to appointing an independent mental health and wellbeing commissioner—it appointed a Mental Health Commissioner—and to spend \$13 million in the first two years of government to develop a comprehensive WA suicide prevention strategy. Well, that has pretty much not been done; it is certainly nowhere near where it should be at this point in time. I want to explore why there has been such a delay, and in doing so I will go into some of the complexities surrounding its framework and getting the money out to the community where it is needed, and the impediments that ensure that that is not happening to the extent it should.

The government promised a new Mental Health Act, which we are a long way from having. We are nearly three years into this government and it is nowhere to be seen. The government committed to tender out to a non-government organisation the requirement to establish and maintain a peak mental health consumer voice in WA. I think it is fair to say that it has tendered it out, but there is no doubt in my mind that there are issues around quality control. After nearly three years in office, successive ministers have done very little apart from establishing the Mental Health Commission, which is still trying to work out its areas of responsibility. Members only had to be at the estimates and financial operations hearing the other day to see just how confused the whole situation is.

Hon Liz Behjat: Which estimates were you at?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: There is no doubt in my mind; the member might have a different mind and a different view.

Hon Donna Faragher: That's right—in your mind! Let's be clear—in your mind!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I was saying there is no doubt in my mind!

The confusion has arisen because a lot of the responsibility for mental health actually sits in the Health portfolio. There is no doubt that Health plays an absolutely major role in the delivery of care and services for people with mental health issues at the very high end of the spectrum. At the other end of the spectrum, we have the non-government sector, which has been contracted by the Mental Health Commission to provide services. The minister told the committee that in due course, over time, she will probably be the minister responsible for the whole of mental health. I assume I have that right, minister, because that is the endgame and where she would like to see things go. I suppose from a ministerial point of view it would be fair enough to expect that, because as the Minister for Mental Health, she would rightly expect to have control of the whole of mental health. But, unfortunately, this is going to be a reality, because it is a really difficult thing to unscramble, and to be honest I do not see it ever being done.

Hon Helen Morton: So are you going to abandon the Mental Health Commission?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is not the point I am making.

Hon Helen Morton: But are you going to keep the Mental Health Commission or not?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The point I am making is that I do not think we can have two Ministers for Mental Health, and that is exactly what we have. We have one who looks after the health department and the delivery of health services to people with mental illness, then we have Hon Helen Morton, Minister for Mental Health, purchasing services from the health department through the Mental Health Commission.

Hon Helen Morton: And many other things.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Do not interrupt me, please.

Hon Helen Morton: Are you going to keep the Mental Health Commission or not—a simple yes or no?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I will tell members the policy when I am ready to announce it!

Hon Helen Morton: You won't be around; you'll go with Mr Ripper!

Hon Simon O'Brien: Go and hitch up the caravan!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Col Holt): Order, members!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: This is a huge issue because at the heart of it is seamless service delivery. We know that the current configuration is such that there is no chance of seamless service delivery. The minister continually talks about the efficient delivery of services, but anybody who knows anything about this sector or speaks to people who are service users—indeed some service providers—will tell members that it is anything but seamless. The minister always talks about wraparound services; I can tell the minister that the people who phone me do not get wraparound services. In fact, they do not actually get any services at all in the vast majority of cases.

Hon Helen Morton: Why don't they?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Many people are finding it very, very hard to access services.

Hon Michael Mischin: They didn't get any services at all under your government.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: We know there are major gaps in service delivery for those who need mental health services. The minister recently went to great lengths to tell the estimate committees that she will eventually also take over responsibility for mental health services in hospitals, and I say that will indeed be very, very sad, because she has gotten off to a very, very poor start.

Hon Helen Morton: You've actually got that wrong.

Hon Liz Behjat: That's unusual!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The Mental Health Commission has been established, so we will give the government a tick there. It is well intentioned, but when we look at the record of achievement after nearly three years in office, there is no doubt that it is wanting. The government is out of its depth, and there is a lack of framework around who is responsible for what. The lines of accountability and responsibility are still very unclear after nearly three years, and it is, in short, a shambles.

The ministerial advisory committee, which was established after a very long, drawn-out process, is even worse.

Hon Helen Morton: In other words, thorough.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: This is how thorough it is. The minister explained in the estimates committee hearing the other day that a number of people were on the board for two years.

Hon Helen Morton: No, you're talking about a different thing. One minute you're talking about the ministerial advisory council; now you're talking about the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am talking about the ministerial advisory committee; I know exactly what I am talking about. If the minister is not listening, that is her problem.

Hon Helen Morton: You haven't got that right.

Hon Michael Mischin: She is listening; that's your problem.

Hon Helen Morton: You've mixed the two up.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Col Holt): Order, members! Perhaps it would be best for the member on her feet to direct her debate towards me.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The ministerial advisory committee —

Hon Helen Morton: She's realised she's got it wrong.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: No, I have not. The ministerial advisory committee has had a number of resignations, including Christopher Morton. Christopher Morton did not renew, and I have to say that if it were a functioning committee, he may well have chosen to stay on.

Hon Helen Morton: Sorry, who?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Christopher Morton.

Hon Helen Morton: Christopher Morton? Who the heck's Christopher Morton?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is the name I understood the minister to say during the estimates hearing. Have I got it wrong?

Hon Helen Morton: You have; I don't know Christopher Morton, and he's certainly no relation of mine.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Sam Buckeridge?

Hon Helen Morton: You're talking about two different things. They are on the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention; you started off and have continued talking about the Mental Health Advisory Council. You have to decide which of these two bodies you are talking about, because they are not one and the same.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Okay; the minister is correct. We are talking about the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention. As I understand it, there were two-year terms to start off with —

Hon Helen Morton: Some two and some three.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Some two, some three. Of the total, there were four people who chose not to renew their membership. I have the name Christopher Morton here —

Hon Helen Morton: Wharton; it's Wharton. You know—the CEO of West Australian newspapers.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Okay, we have Steve Patchett and Sam Buckeridge. Paul Hasleby has recently resigned —

Hon Helen Morton: No, you're not correct there. His term is coming to an end; he hasn't resigned.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: He is not renewing?

Hon Helen Morton: He's not continuing, and that's an agreed position between us both.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: John Franklyn, as I understand, has resigned.

Hon Helen Morton: He's resigned, and I've given the reasons why.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes, the minister has, but the point —

Hon Michael Mischin: And you keep calling him “doctor”.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Big deal. He probably should be, given that he is on the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention.

Hon Helen Morton: Should be a doctor? Why would you need a doctor there?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Quite clearly this is not a particularly well-functioning —

Hon Michael Mischin: Debate.

Hon Liz Behjat: This is not a particularly well-researched speech—is what you're trying to say.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is not what I am trying to say. I am trying to say that this is not a particularly effective body because quite a number of people have taken the position that they no longer want to be part of it. Had they received more direction from the minister, and had their roles been clearer, perhaps they would have wanted to remain on this particular advisory council. It becomes particularly tricky in respect of the Centrecare organisation. In the rollout of community action plans, any funding that is expended or recommended to be expended by Centrecare needs to go through a process in which the application is made to the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention. It has to get a tick-off there, and from there it goes to the minister; it is a two-part process.

Hon Helen Morton: What do you understand Centrecare's role to be?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: We had a briefing with Centrecare the other day, and I have to say that the sense I got was that there is some lack of clarity surrounding its role; it certainly does not think it plays a role in respect of the critical care component and the high-end —

Hon Helen Morton: It is the directorate to the Ministerial Council on Suicide Prevention, so that is what they do. It provides administrative support to the ministerial council; it is not, in itself, making decisions around who gets funding and who doesn't. The ministerial council does that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I understand that, but it makes the recommendation.

Hon Helen Morton: Yes, to the council.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It makes the recommendation to the ministerial council, the recommendation gets the tick-off from the ministerial council, and then it goes to the minister. The minister then gives it the tick-off; that is how the process works.

Hon Helen Morton: That's right.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The point I am trying to make is the fact that there have been so many resignations from the Ministerial Council on Suicide Prevention explains in part why there has been so little progress with the rollout of the community action plans. That is the view I hold. I believe that to be the case, and

I think it is a fair enough criticism about the way that this whole thing has been administered. That is pretty concerning. What is really needed is some stability of membership of the ministerial council so we can make some real progress. I understand that a number of CAPs have been approved and we are just waiting on the signing of the final agreements.

Hon Helen Morton: Yes, okay; I think that is moving. I think that has gone ahead.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: All right, but technically only one is fully operational.

Hon Helen Morton: No, that's not true.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is not true? The minister might correct the record.

There are also grounds for concern about the amount of time it is taking the minister to progress the strategic plan. I understand that the strategic plan is on her desk and that she is going to make some changes to it. However, in all seriousness, we are three years down the track, and people are very, very concerned about what they see as a lack of progress. They are also concerned about the fact that \$600 000 has been spent —

Hon Helen Morton: There was a very comprehensive consultation process; it was excellent.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is fine, and it may well be an excellent report; but at the end of the day, we are only a year or so away from an election and the strategic direction for mental health has yet to be set. I am concerned, and the people in the sector are telling me that they are concerned, because we do not have a strategic plan, we do not have a policy —

Hon Helen Morton: It's the same thing.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: All right; it is the same thing. We do not have the bill.

Hon Helen Morton: That was always intended to come out within the time frame that's happening now. It's only in your imagination that somehow or other it would get out in the first or second year.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is not what the sector is telling me. The minister has said to this house that she hoped the legislation would be here earlier and that she had an early draft, but there was —

Hon Helen Morton: No, that's the ministerial council—that's what I said I'd hoped would be earlier. The bill was much more comprehensive than that, and it's working entirely to its time frame.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I can give the minister a copy of a transcript in which she makes the point that she has had to recommission the quality assurance framework to see how everything is going to be captured within the legislation, and that this is why the progress of the legislation has been slowed down.

Hon Helen Morton: That's why the legislation couldn't be achieved in the first or second year, but that's not because it has slowed down; that's because the reality of life is that there's now a commission—a different environment.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The point I made at the time is the same point I make now: the minister knew then that there was going to be a commission, because it was an election commitment.

Hon Helen Morton: But we didn't know what sort of commission. You can't write legislation until you know what sort of commission it is. There are four or five different models of a commission. Even a federal commission is different from a state commission; a New Zealand commission is different again. Until that commission was bedded down, you couldn't actually start to do the work on the legislation.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Okay. The minister may not share this view, but I think it is fair to say that most people in this sector are concerned about the fact this legislation is taking too long. The way they see it, and I agree with them, is that it is unlikely this legislation will be dealt with prior to the end of this year.

Hon Helen Morton: Is there an election at the end of the year?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: There is not an election at the end of the year, but I assume we will go to an election some time in —

Hon Liz Behjat: March 2013.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is right; in 2013.

Hon Helen Morton: There is all of 2012. Have you lost that year?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: If the minister thinks that is acceptable, that a promise to introduce a bill —

Hon Helen Morton: What is the promise?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The minister said she would introduce legislation. She has not introduced legislation. It will be right towards the end of the term. If she thinks that is acceptable, that is fine.

I will quickly turn to the rollout of the statewide suicide prevention strategy. Clearly, that strategy is not delivering on the ground as it should be. It is just another reflection of the fact that the mental health agenda is all over the place. The way it is being actioned is all over the place. There are some very serious concerns out there.

In terms of current pressures in mental health, what I am hearing on the ground is that a lot of people are presenting to hospitals with an acute mental health illness. There is enormous pressure, through emergency departments, for hospital beds. People who desperately need hospital beds simply are not getting access to them. We know there is never a vacant hospital bed when it comes to mental illness. We also know that early discharges are becoming quite the norm. We have heard the case of Ruby Nicholls-Diver, and we know of other cases. There is certainly talk about early discharges in and around the Kalgoorlie area and the Kalgoorlie hospital. During the estimates hearings I asked the minister for information about what is happening at Kalgoorlie hospital. She has given an undertaking to provide that information. There is no doubt that more needs to be done to make sure people are not discharged early. When people present to emergency departments they need to be looked after and treated appropriately. It is very alarming indeed that there are so many stories of people who are not receiving appropriate care.

Rockingham hospital has 20 new beds as part of its rebuild. During the estimates hearings we found out that the Chief Psychiatrist had a couple of issues in relation to the facility not meeting the requirements for those beds to be authorised. There was a swipe card issue and an issue about the fence being too low. When we looked into it, we found little progress had been made on either the fence or the swipe card issue. From memory, the officer in charge of the South Metropolitan Area Health Service was not in a position to explain why no attention had been given to this issue. What it really represents is a government that is not taking this issue very seriously; that is, 20 beds could be used for involuntary patients if they had been authorised —

Hon Helen Morton: They are being used for voluntary patients; you know that.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: They are not authorised, so it means that involuntary patients cannot be sent there.

Hon Helen Morton: But they are being used for people with a mental illness.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: They are, but surely it would be in the minister's interest to know that —

Hon Helen Morton: Absolutely. I am not denying that at all, but don't give the impression they are not being used for mental health patients because they are.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: No, I am not saying that. They are being used for voluntary patients, but they are not being used for involuntary patients. The minister knows there is high demand for beds for involuntary patients. It denies the system the flexibility to cater for both. There is a problem.

I quickly want to touch on the lack of specialised staff in mental health. From answers to questions posed through Parliament, we know there is a considerable shortage of specialist mental health staff. In particular, we know that right throughout the system there are shortages of psychiatrists, psychologists and mental health nurses. This is causing significant problems right throughout the state. I have asked for some additional information about how long these positions have been vacant. I do not know whether the health department is on some sort of staff reduction strategy. There have been voluntary severance offerings so that people who do not want to work any longer for the government can get a payout and leave the employ of the government. It would be very concerning if we were losing people with those types of skills. I would be really concerned if those positions were intentionally not being filled as part of a savings measure by the government. We will be monitoring the situation in relation to staff.

Hon Helen Morton: That is really kind of almost a sick view.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It might well be sick but, minister, they are actually not there on —

Hon Helen Morton: The idea that somebody would hold back staff just to save money —

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It is not that sick, believe you me! I hope the minister will provide the information about how long those positions have been vacant. Quite frankly, I do not understand why. As at February 2011 there should have been 11.2 psychiatrists at the Child and Adolescent Health Service, yet there were only 5.8.

Hon Helen Morton: You have been told that has now been filled, except for one.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I do not care; even one. The real question is: how long were those positions vacant?

Hon Helen Morton: The real question was you were trying to suggest it was deliberate, to make a saving, for goodness sake!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I do not know whether it was or it was not. When the minister provides me with the answer in terms of how long those positions were vacant, then we will know exactly —

Hon Helen Morton: Whether it is deliberate or not.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes—whether it is a cost-saving measure on this government’s part.

Hon Helen Morton: That is a sick thought.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I do not know whether it is sick or not. It is not sick in my mind; it is a commonsense question. I would hope in time the minister will answer that.

We also know, for example, that there should have been a full staffing level of 51.8 at the North Metropolitan Area Health Service, yet there were only 45.2. Likewise, in the South Metropolitan Area Health Service there should be 54.9 and there are only 47.1. Then there is the WA Country Health Service. When Angela Nundle appeared at the Esperance District Hospital, no-one was prepared to help her —

Hon Helen Morton: You have already been told that those vacant positions have been filled by temporary staff or contract staff. It is not like we are saving money by leaving a position vacant.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: When the minister provides the information, we will know the exact extent of the problem. In terms of psychiatrists, there is no doubt that the WA Country Health Service is under pressure. It should have 21.3 staff but it only has 15.2. There is clearly a problem there. The minister might be offended at the fact this issue has been raised. She might call it sick but, quite frankly, people do not find it acceptable.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I welcome the opportunity to continue my remarks. The increasing mental health crisis is becoming evident in the hospital system by the impact it is having on admissions into hospitals and the capacity of hospitals to respond. I want to quickly put on the public record some figures for the January to March 2011 quarter, reported in the “WA Health Performance Report”. The report paints a very concerning picture of what is happening in the area of mental health and hospital admissions. It shows that during the January to March 2011 quarter there was an 8.4 per cent increase in the number of people admitted to mental health services statewide. In the January to March 2010 quarter there was a 7.1 per cent increase in the number of attendances at mental health outpatient clinics and in the January to March 2011 quarter there were 177 605 attendances at mental health outpatient clinics. In the January to March 2010 quarter there were 11 773 more attendances at mental health outpatient clinics, which is a 7.1 per cent increase. The figures show that demand for mental health services is on the increase. Under the four-hour rule policy, between January and March 2011, 3 618 mental health patients were admitted to hospitals from emergency departments. That represents an increase of 543 more mental health patients admitted to hospitals from emergency departments, or a 17.7 per cent increase. In the January to March 2011 quarter, 3 272 people were admitted to mental health services in the metropolitan area, which is 147 more admissions for mental health services, or a 6.6 per cent increase, and the number of mental health patients admitted from hospital emergency departments increased by 17.4 per cent.

These figures indicate that we have a growing demand for health services, and the trends are very concerning, given the four-hour rule and the pressure on the health system generally. I took the opportunity to visit a number of hospitals recently, including Fremantle Hospital in Alma Street, the Frankland Centre and Graylands Hospital. Everywhere I went I was advised of the pressures placed on the health system. People were forthcoming about those pressures and made it clear to me that there is enormous pressure to discharge patients because new patients cannot be taken in, as a general rule, unless there is a vacancy in the hospital. Our hospital system should not be driven by economics, as opposed to good health care, but that is the sad reality.

A feature of the current health system is that it disadvantages people with a mental illness in particular because once they are discharged into the community many people with a mental illness do not have the ability to cope. It is very sad that there is little follow-through to find out whether they are okay and need support services. Often it is assumed that they will go back to their happy families and will have a support network around them but that is not always the case. Many people with a mental illness find themselves isolated and marginalised and, as a consequence, when they are discharged from a hospital or other facility, they find it particularly difficult to cope. That is a problematic situation.

The Minister for Mental Health has spoken at length about wraparound services. It would be interesting to find out what the minister means by “wraparound services” because there do not appear to be many. Although the term implies that people who are discharged from a facility have access to a quality wraparound care package,

the reality is very different from the rhetoric. I have only to refer to the case of Eddie Dayeh, whom I have mentioned in Parliament a number of times. He was discharged from Graylands Hospital but had lost his Department of Housing unit. He is now in private rental accommodation. A person who was acting on his behalf rang me the other day and say that Eddie is having difficulties with another tenant in the rental accommodation, who may well have issues. The person acting on Eddie's behalf wanted to find out when Eddie could make an application for a Department of Housing house or unit.

His chances of getting a Department of Housing house or unit are almost negligible. His access to wraparound services has been non-existent; I do not think he has had any services wrapped around him at all. The person who was ringing on his behalf was particularly concerned because, as they explained it to me, unless Eddie can get back into some sort of government accommodation it is inevitable that he will be homeless. We have a case in which there is an obvious systems failure. One might argue that it is not a state responsibility to provide support to people such as Eddie, and that it is just his bad luck. However, I do not hold that view and I think that there is a community and a social responsibility to do so, because this could happen to anybody. If it was our brother, sister, husband or wife, it would be comforting to know that those support services provided by the state are there to provide assistance to the individual. I put on the public record that I am following what happens to Mr Dayeh really closely, because it is in the public interest to do so; I also think that it is the right thing to do as a person. Somebody has presented to me with a complex problem; I believe that the person has been treated unfairly. He is one of many people who this system is failing and it is in the broader public interest to ensure that this case is followed through very carefully, because I am sure that he is only one of many people with a mental illness to share this type of experience. The experiences of others may not be exactly the same, but there is no doubt that monitoring may put some pressure on the government and perhaps we might get some better outcomes.

I will also make some observations about the non-government sector. The government has committed a large sum of money towards it. A significant portion of the mental health budget is used to buy services directly from the Department of Health. Another significant portion of the spend is to buy services from the non-government sector. There are currently 78 non-government sector agencies that provide a whole range of services to people with mental illness. Unfortunately, few, if any, of those services operate on weekends, and that, I am told, is when people with mental illness often need services the most. Putting that to one side, an enormous amount of money is spent on the delivery of those non-government organisation services that provide all types of support to people with mental illness. The Chief Psychiatrist has the responsibility of monitoring whether the NGOs actually meet a set of standards for the services that they deliver. There are questions about the effectiveness of the way these services are delivered and monitored. From everything that I can see, there is no doubt in my mind that this area needs great improvement. It is one thing to allocate money to non-government organisations; it is another thing to make sure that they are delivering.

One thing that really concerns me is that there does not seem to be a framework within which non-government organisations should deliver their services. There do not seem to be any protocols for how NGOs interface with each other and how they might interface with the medical system or the hospital system. It also worries me that this lack of protocols means that clients will fall through the cracks between one NGO service provider and another, and indeed, between the non-government sector service providers and the government sector service providers. I do not say for a moment that these issues are without complexity. I appreciate that the government is in the early stages of developing some of these models. However, the government and the minister should consider it an urgent priority to ensure that these protocols are put into place and that there is a proper framework within which the NGO sector operates. Specifically, minister, I can imagine that there would be situations, for example, in which a person with a mental illness may in fact be presenting to a number of NGOs. They might be presenting with the same set of problems or they might be presenting with a different set of problems. I do not know, but I would assume —

Hon Helen Morton: What is the problem?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Apart from anything else, if that person is presenting three times, to three different suppliers of services, for the same sort of problem, first, it is a waste of resources, and secondly, there is the real issue about treatment. If three lots of NGOs are not talking to one another or not passing on information, there is a problem.

Hon Helen Morton: Do you have three different suppliers doing things for you at home in some way or another? They do not all talk to each other. Why would you want them all making sure that they talk to each other in that respect? The person that needs to make sure things are coordinated is the person receiving the services.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Jon Ford): Order, members! Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has the call. That is not an interjection; that is a statement. If the minister wants the call, she can stand. She has to remember that it is Thursday afternoon and I am in the chair.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: And I am grateful!

Hon Simon O'Brien: We are all grateful!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Members, let us not have break out of a break for this!

Point of Order

Hon HELEN MORTON: Mr Deputy President, you might give me some indication about this, but when Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich specifically asked me a question—she actually said, “Minister, I think this that or the other; perhaps you could tell me this that or the other”—I imagined that it was an invitation for an interjection. But, if you tell me otherwise, then I shall not interject. I just wanted to know whether, on that occasion, when I am being invited to interject by the person speaking, it is acceptable.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No!

Debate Resumed

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Next time do not ask!

I just cannot believe that I heard the minister say that there is no problem if three NGOs provide the same service to one client. Furthermore, implicit in that would be the fact that these NGOs are probably not communicating with each another, and nor are they passing on information or records to each other. I will communicate with the people who provide information to me to see whether it is a generally held view that this is acceptable. I would think that most people in the sector would argue that there should be much better communication between service providers. Official records should be kept and information passed on. There should be protocols for the passing on of important medical information or information related to the service being provided. Whilst I have concerns about that, I also have concerns about whether the services that are being paid for by the Western Australian taxpayer are being delivered to the people who need them; that is, the users of mental health services.

Hon Michael Mischin: A couple of weeks ago your side was saying that they ought to go on wages.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Addresses should be made to the Chair. If members want to seek the call, they should jump to their feet. I ask Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich to please address her speech to the Chair.

Hon Helen Morton interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The minister does not have to be here; she could have urgent private business to attend to.

Several members interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am sure she has some.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich really needs to address me.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thanks, Mr Deputy President. The Chief Psychiatrist has responsibility under the Mental Health Act to monitor the standard of psychiatric care provided by community mental health facilities. For the non-government sector, this responsibility is exercised through a monitoring program based on the service standards for non-government providers of community mental health services. I understand that the Chief Psychiatrist has a rolling program of these assessments. He had a timetable for 2010. A number of organisations—I think nine—were looked at in February 2010. In June there were another 10 and then in July, and so on and so forth. It would be very interesting to see what information is gathered by the Chief Psychiatrist when he undertakes the monitoring of service standards for non-government providers of community mental health services. I asked for some of the reports of those assessments during the hearings of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations.

Another important feature of the work done by the Chief Psychiatrist is a monitoring program of self assessments. This is when an organisation does its own assessment of whether it has achieved the standards that have been set. Those standards run across eight categories, including rights and responsibilities, safety, privacy and confidentiality, consumer participation, and the participation of carers and significant others. The participation of carers and significant others is absolutely critical in caring for people with mental health issues and people who have needs in that area. People who have a mental illness need that support in place around them to achieve the best outcome for their recovery and a sustainable positive outcome for their illness. The other standards are organisational governance and management, accessibility, inclusive service provision, and the delivery of services. I have not seen the self assessments for 2010. I will be very keen to see them to find out whether there has been any improvement. The 2009 self assessments showed that these standards were not being achieved by many NGOs. From what I can also see, nothing much happens as a result of those standards not being achieved. In other words, nothing happens in terms of taking away funding from or recording a black mark

against those providers. The minister is shaking her head. The response in estimates was that the government is going to try to get them up to a standard. The Chief Psychiatrist said that the whole idea was to get them to a standard. I accept that. But having said that, each time the standard is not met, a person with a mental illness is not getting the sort of support or the standard of delivery of service that is being paid for by the Western Australian taxpayer. The figure that really concerns me is that only 62 per cent of the NGOs that undertook the self assessment under the 2009 non-government organisation standards monitoring program achieved the standard of participation of carers and significant others. That is by their own measure! We have to be very concerned about that. Some of the other responses are also cause for concern. Twenty five per cent of organisations did not meet the standard of understanding rights and responsibilities. This indicates to me that there is a real issue with the delivery of services by NGOs. It needs to be better monitored. There may need to be more frequent monitoring. The standards need to be better defined in terms of what is expected from the NGOs; in other words, what they have to do to ensure that the standards are met. There is one argument that this is not good for taxpayers, who fund the NGOs indirectly. The most important issue is that people who have a mental illness are not getting the quality of support they need because the standards are simply not being met. That is a real problem.

The other issue I want to raise is one that has been raised time and again by Hon Linda Savage. She has taken a very keen interest in the Bentley Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and has done a great job. The government promised that \$3 million would go to the Bentley unit following the report of the Council of Official Visitors. This unit was not in a good state and certainly was not conducive to recovery and so on. The federal government has allocated \$4.5 million to the unit. The Minister for Mental Health has commented in this place that the \$3 million allocated to the unit by the state government will probably now go somewhere else. I assume it will probably go out of the mental health budget and into the consolidated fund. I do not know, but when the minister gets the chance to speak —

Hon Helen Morton: That is ridiculous.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Well, where is the money going to go? It is not that ridiculous.

Hon Helen Morton: I am not allowed to speak, am I?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: When the minister gets up to make a speech on another occasion, she can perhaps explain to us the status of the \$3 million that will now be saved because the commonwealth government will be providing \$4.5 million for the upgrade of the Bentley Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. I would appreciate the minister also telling us whether any of that money will go towards the provision of additional mental health support services for young people. There is an obsession with ensuring that we cater for adults. Not enough effort is being put into children and adolescents. That is the stage when we might be able to intercept and attend to some of the growth in the number of people with mental illness, because we also need to address it at the front end.

I notice that there will be 90 beds in the adult psychiatric unit at the new Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital site. I am not sure whether that figure is correct; I cannot remember the exact number. The argument has been put to me that because of the increase in the number of adult beds across the system, we are missing out on an opportunity to provide more beds for young people. I fully concur with that, and there is no doubt in my mind that we need to do more in that area.

I ask the minister to look very, very carefully at what is happening to the South Metropolitan Area Health Service community emergency response team in Fremantle. My understanding is that CERT is at risk. This is one of the issues that falls between the Minister for Health and the Minister for Mental Health. The Minister for Mental Health has given me an assurance that the future of the community emergency response team in Fremantle is secure and that there will not be any loss of staff or reduction in the amount of time that staff spend on providing emergency relief to people with mental illnesses. I want the Minister for Mental Health to speak to the Minister for Health to ensure that we get some assurances from him, because I fear that she might support it and he probably will not. Emergency response in the south metropolitan area is very much at risk. I know that the minister cannot speak, but I assume from the way that she is holding her pen that she will speak to the Minister for Health about this matter!

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Ken Baston**.