

ROTTNEST ISLAND ACCOMMODATION

Motion

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys) [4.04 pm]: I move -

That this House calls on the Minister for Tourism to immediately honour his Government's commitment to provide \$14 million over four years to upgrade accommodation on Rottnest Island, especially in light of recent price hikes, rather than simply waste taxpayer funds on yet another task force.

I have moved this motion today because of the serious deterioration of aspects of Rottnest Island, one of Western Australia's most popular holiday resorts. It has been described as "rotting Rottnest", which disturbs me greatly. The Auditor General's report tabled in the House today states quite clearly that \$50 million needs to be spent over the next five years, because the deterioration of facilities and infrastructure on the island has made it unsustainable. The Auditor General's report also states - this has been confirmed in a press release by the Rottnest Island Authority today - that if immediate action is not taken to remedy the decaying infrastructure on Rottnest Island, including the holiday units and villas, visitors may not be able to access the island because of serious safety issues.

We need to look at a bit of history. The Opposition accuses the Government of not fulfilling its election commitment, and not spending the promised money on Rottnest Island. The Government comes back and says that the Opposition did not do anything when it was in government, which is totally untrue. I will dispel that myth straightaway. I will talk a bit about the historical background before getting into the main thrust of my argument. The Rottnest Island Authority was established as a statutory authority in 1987. The Act, introduced by the Labor Government, requires that the authority be self-sufficient. The authority was never able to be self-sufficient; it could never cover all the costs of infrastructure and capital works simply from the income it receives from visitors to the island. That is impossible.

Section 11(2) of the Rottnest Island Authority Act 1987 gives the authority the power to control and manage the island for the following purposes -

- (a) to provide and operate recreational and holiday facilities on the Island;
- (b) to protect the flora and fauna of the Island; and
- (c) to maintain and protect the natural environment and the man-made resources of the Island and, to the extent that the Authority's resources allow, repair its natural environment.

The authority's expected outcome for the Government was the provision of accessible recreational and holiday facilities appropriate to the island environment for the benefit of Western Australian families and other visitors, and the conservation of natural cultural values. Let us look back in time and see what happened in the 1980s, because that is a very important aspect. The Labor Government turned the island into what was known as Rottnest Inc. We have seen WA Inc, but the island was known as Rottnest Inc. It was known by that name because it was operated for Labor ministers and their mates. They could go over there and spend holidays for as long as they liked without paying any money whatsoever. That was a disgrace, but something else happened that obviously cost an awful lot of money. That was the opening of the new boat moorings in Catherine Beach and Marjorie Bay. That was done for Labor's mates in those days - Laurie Connell and Alan Bond. They even blew up part of a reef so that they could get their boats in, because they were too big to get into the normal moorings. What a wonderful opportunity that was for these mates of the ALP Government of the day! I am sure the Minister for Tourism would love to explain why that happened. As I said, ministers and their advisers stayed in accommodation at taxpayers' expense.

That was Labor's record when it was last in government. Now let us contrast that with the coalition's time in government. I want recorded in *Hansard* what the coalition did during the years that it was in government. In April 1995, Premier Richard Court established a major review of all aspects of Rottnest Island to develop a 20-year vision. Between 1995-96 and the 2001 election, the former Government spent \$16.3 million on infrastructure and facilities for the island - not \$14 million, which the Labor Party promised to spend during the last election. There is no question that it has broken that promise - another broken promise. I want to list some of the items on which the former Government expended money, because I believe it is important to get it on the record. The former Government expended money on the refurbishment of the Thomson Bay mall featuring a safe and uniform surface, a podium, landscaping, signage and additional bike racks. It paid for the upgrade of the general store, which is a heritage building, of course. The previous Government expended money on the refurbishment of holiday accommodation units. It built the new fuel jetty. It repaired and restored heritage buildings K1 and K2. It also funded the restoration of the Picture Hall heritage centre and the new waste water plant and upgrade of water supply and sewage treatment facilities. That cost more than \$5 million. The previous

Government put in the desalination plant. Until it did that, people who holidayed on Rottnest Island had to shower in salt water. It upgraded the tearooms and the boardwalks. It did all of that. It spent \$16.3 million in the last four years of its term in government. Therefore, nobody can say that the previous Government did not have a commitment to Rottnest Island. We know that more can always be spent on an area as important as Rottnest Island. However, the previous Government had a vision and a plan to do that, and it showed its commitment by spending that amount of money.

Let us look at Labor's promise during the election campaign. The Labor tourism policy states -

Labor will:

...

- **ensure that \$14 million is allocated over four years to upgrade and repair holiday accommodation units and settlement areas on Rottnest;**

Another part of its tourism policy states -

Labor will:

...

- **work to ensure that holidays at Rottnest remain affordable to the average citizen;**

They are two lovely policies. It would have been great if Labor had put them into effect. What has it done? It has spent a pittance of the \$14 million. I will go into more detail about that shortly. It is getting to the stage that the Government is not maintaining affordable holiday units for people from mainland Western Australia to travel to.

Rottnest Island is not a foreign country. It is a very special and important part of Western Australia. The Rottnest Island Authority will never be able to cover all the expenses necessary to maintain Rottnest Island, which is an A-class reserve, simply from the income it receives from the rental of the holiday units. There must be a commitment by the Government. It must realise that Rottnest Island is an integral part of Western Australia. A bit of water may separate Rottnest Island and the mainland, but it is not a lot of water. This Government needs to show a commitment.

I will take the House through the funding for the past few years. In 2000-01 when the coalition Government was in power, the total capital works funding was \$3.618 million. In 2001-02 when the Government of Western Australia changed and the Labor Party took control, it reduced that figure to \$2.763 million. However, it gets worse. In 2002-03, the Government reduced that figure again to \$1.727 million. These are official budget figures, so there is no argument about this. What will the Government say? In 2003-04, \$3.036 million was budgeted, but \$2.075 million was provided for a windmill. How does that upgrade the tourist accommodation facilities on Rottnest Island? The windmill was a major capital cost as part of the infrastructure on the island, and it was the Government's choice to fund that project. However, the total funding cut was \$1.89 million in the first two budgets of this Government, with an underspending of approximately \$1 million in 2002-03.

I turn now to the tourist facilities upgrade capital works funding. In 2001-02, during the time of a coalition Government, the allocation was \$2.21 million. In 2001-02, under the then new Labor Government - the one that made that promise - funding was reduced to \$2.513 million. In 2002-03, the allocation was reduced again to \$1.272 million. This was an underspending of half a million dollars. What amount is budgeted for in 2003-04? It is \$869 000 - not even \$1 million. How can anyone take this Government seriously when it says it will spend money on infrastructure on Rottnest Island? After this task force is put in place, how can people seriously expect that money will be spent on Rottnest? It has been estimated that \$50 million per annum is needed over five years, yet the Government will not spend the \$14 million it promised the taxpayers of Western Australia at the last election. The Opposition does not trust this Government, but, more importantly, the public of Western Australia does not trust this Government. It has seen many broken promises - this is but another one. The total tourist facilities upgrade expenditure in the Government's first three budgets was \$5.019 million. That is a cut of nearly 75 per cent in that funding since the election of this Government. That is disgraceful.

I now move to the Rottnest Island management plan, which was released in March 2003 as a five-year plan for the island following a three-month public consultation period. The minister made great news of this plan and told us in front of television cameras the wonderful things that were to happen. The management plan contained 249 recommendations. I will run through some of these. The recommendations included annual adjustments to individual admission fees commencing on 1 July 2003. That will be a cost hike in going to Rottnest. Another recommendation is the annual revision of accommodation costs, which will be another price hike. The plan outlined that accommodation costs should be increased according to a schedule, and backdated to bookings from 1 January 2003. The Government even made that hike retrospective. The recommendations also included a review of charges for the full range of tours and visitor services to be undertaken. In other words, another price

hike. An annual review and amendment of bus service fees and charges was recommended. That is another increase in prices. It was recommended that aerodrome fees be reviewed. I assure members that these fees will not be reduced. It was recommended that an increase in boating annual payments be made in lieu of admission fees. That will be another price hike. There will be an annual review of the boating annual payment. It was recommended in the plan that the recreational mooring site licence fees be revised. I will bet that the minister will not tell the House that these fees will be reduced. The plan outlined introducing an annual authorised user fee of \$33 per metre for boating, and a review of all mooring fees annually. That price increase will be made on an annual basis. It was also recommended that an increase be made to rental swing mooring fees, an increase in the Bathurst mooring fee and an annual review of rental mooring prices. Those fees will not go down; they will go up. Another recommendation is to increase charges for rental pens at jetties - yet another increase. The report also recommended that rental pen prices be annually reviewed. Once again, those prices will not go down; they will go up. It also recommended that the existing range of accommodation be retained. I am sure it will be, but I bet we see another price hike for it. Another recommendation is to investigate designs for new cottages for when the existing cottages need replacement. A lot of the existing cottages are in that condition now, because the Government is not spending money to renovate or repair them. What a situation for people to face when they go to Rottnest Island for a holiday! It also recommended that the feasibility of redeveloping the current Kelly and Abbot Street accommodation be investigated. These are all words; the Government is not actually doing anything. Another recommendation is to refurbish the existing heritage cottages and Geordie-Longreach settlement units.

According to the annual report of the Rottnest Island Authority, only six of the 249 recommendations have been implemented. What do they include? Bearing in mind that this report was released eight months ago, all that is included in the six recommendations are price hikes for accommodation and new uniforms for the authority staff. The Government has not done much. The minister and this Government have been sitting on their hands on this issue. The Government took a long time to bring this report to the Parliament. What has it done? Only six out of 249 recommendations have been taken seriously. During question time I asked the minister which recommendations had been implemented but were not successful, but he could not answer my question. He has probably been advised since then, and I hope he provides me with the answer in his response.

According to the Rottnest Island Authority report for 2002-03, only 56 per cent of visitors were satisfied with accommodation on the island. If only 56 per cent of visitors to any commercial hotel or holiday resort were satisfied with the accommodation, it would go bankrupt because it would not be able to operate. The lowest satisfaction ratings were given for furniture and fittings and linen and bedding. I know about this issue because my family went to Rottnest Island recently and they had to take their own bed sheets and various other items. At the moment Rottnest Island has about one and a half-star accommodation, when it should have at least three or four-star accommodation. Western Australian people deserve quality and affordable accommodation on Rottnest Island. However, they are not getting it. How can I prove that? I can prove it because 56 per cent of visitors have said so.

As I said earlier, on 22 November the minister announced an innovative action plan to safeguard the future of Rottnest Island. That action plan was, of course, the establishment of yet another task force. I will ask the minister a question and he can interject and give me an answer if he wants to, but I doubt he will. Why did the minister come out with that press release and announce the task force? I will tell members the reason he did that. He did it because some time last week or maybe the week before he would have received a briefing from the Auditor General. Is that right, minister? No, he will not answer. I can tell members that he did because I know how things work in government. I will answer that question for the minister. He would have had a briefing from the Auditor General and he would have seen how damning that report was of an authority that falls within the minister's portfolio area. I am sure that the minister's staff have been busy working like little beavers to circumvent this and get on the front foot. What did the minister do? He made a public announcement on 22 November. You may smile, Mr Acting Speaker, but I know how the system works; do not forget that. Once again the minister has been pushed into a corner. He definitely would not have made that announcement unless he had received a briefing from the Auditor General. In a way, it is cheating the system, because it is normally a private meeting between the Auditor General and the minister. Ministers of particular portfolio areas receive a briefing about what the Auditor General will report so that they are aware of what is coming up. The minister should have waited until the Auditor General tabled his report in this Parliament before he announced what he would do. However, that was not the case. We know how the Gallop Labor Government works. Its spin doctors have been working overtime on this issue. That is what has happened in the minister's office. That is why on 22 November he announced exactly what he would do. I wonder whether the minister will comment on that when he gets to his feet. I doubt he will because it does not look too good for him.

The most critical part of the Auditor General's report states -

Without urgent attention, the RIA will be left with little choice but to reconsider public access and use of the Island.

That is hard to reconcile with the minister's announcement of a new task force. This must be the three hundred and fiftieth task force the Government has set up in three years. I would like the minister to include in his response why it will take the task force six months or so to report. I asked the Auditor General what would be a reasonable time in which to work out a business plan to deal with these problems. I asked whether it could be done in a month. The Auditor General said that it could but that it would most probably take a maximum of three months. The task force's work could be done in three months. The minister is buying time. If the task force reported in three months or less, he would have to include some funding for the authority in next year's budget.

Mr R.C. Kucera: I will respond to that one. You obviously did not listen to my announcement. I said that I expect the task force to report to me by April next year. In my calculation, that is three months away. Do you apply that same logic to all your economic calculations?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The minister is not very good at maths, is he? I want to pick on the minister's maths. He says it will be three months. We are now in November, following which there will be December, January, February, March and April. That is five months.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Three months into the new year.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That is March, my friend, not April. Does the minister miss a month or something?

Mr R.C. Kucera: You know that most of government shuts down over January.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, it does not. Government runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year. It might shut down in the minister's particular instance. He might want to go off on a jolly somewhere; that is up to him. Government does not shut down. A minister is always in charge.

Mr R.C. Kucera: I should go to Rottnest.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: If the minister wanted to go to Rottnest or further afield on one of his junkets, he could do so, but another minister would have to act on his behalf. There would have to be an acting Minister for Tourism. Actually, that might be a good idea. The minister should go away for three months. Someone who is competent might be put in the job, and something might get done.

The task force will not report for five months. I know the system. It could be the end of April, or, like so many things, the end of April will come and go and we will hear that the task force has almost finished its report and has asked for an extension. It could be May before it reports. If that is the case, it will be too late to incorporate any specific funding resulting from the recommendations of that task force into the budget for the next financial year. What will the minister do? He will not spend much money next year. He will make out that he will spend money, but we know that most of the available money will go into the ridiculous plan to put the railway down the southern freeway. We know about that money. The Government needs every cent it can get from every portfolio area to cover the cost blow-out of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure's plan for the southern railway. We know that. We also know that the Government cannot do much work on Rottnest at the moment because it is the holiday, or high, season. Why did the minister not get off his backside and make sure some work was done in the quiet shoulder period? The cottages cannot be renovated if they are fully booked, and at this time of the year, during the school holidays, they are fully booked. Nothing will happen there. The minister said today that if something urgent happened and something needed immediate repair for safety reasons, he would make sure it was done. Of course he would. He has an absolute duty and obligation to do that. However, all that will be done is a bandaid job, as people will not be able to get in to do the proper work.

We are not going to see a great deal of action from this minister, that is for sure. In some ways, I sympathise with him because his hands are tied. I am sure he would love to spend the money; he could have more photo opportunities, he could hold more doorstops and he could make more announcements on opening a little kiosk or a new unit that has just been renovated on Rottnest Island and those sorts of things. We know the minister loves doing that. However, the public is not wearing that now, minister. It can see behind the facade that he puts up when he appears in front of the cameras and speaks on the radio. The other day I said to a reporter that I thought the minister deserved an Oscar for acting, but for bad acting, not good acting. His attempt to come across as sincere is so apparent that it does not fool anybody.

I will point out why the Rottnest Island Authority is now having problems. I will refer to figures from its annual report, which I have headed up in my notes, "Rottnest Island: Labor's mismanagement story". If we consider the costs, this is what the authority has to put up with: under a coalition Government in 2000-01, the cost for employees - wages and the number of employees etc - was \$4.7 million. When Labor got into government the number of employees started to increase, as did their wages. The unions that run this Labor Party said, "Right,

we want an increase in salary for everybody” and they had their way. The increase started in 2001-02; in one year it went from \$4.7 million to \$5.9 million. The authority has to pay that extra money because of this Government’s commitments to the union movement so that the Government can save face. However, it gets worse. In 2002-03 the costs took another hike, to \$6.865 million. In the course of going from a coalition to a Labor Government and in the first two years that Labor was in government, employee costs - salaries and increases in the number of employees - increased by 46.1 per cent. That is horrendous. However, the Government is not paying that; the Rottnest Island Authority is paying that, which is why it now has a big deficit.

The net cash from operating activities during the last year of the coalition Government was \$1.968 million. In the first year of the Labor Government the deficit was minus \$209 000 because of all the extra wages that it had to pay out. In the following year it was minus \$378 000. That is what the Rottnest Island Authority had to pay. However, the net cash provided by the coalition Government in 2000-01 - the money that we as a Government gave to the Rottnest Island Authority Board - was \$2.067 million. In the first year of the Gallop Labor Government that figure reduced to \$1.7 million; it went from over \$2 million to \$1.7 million, and it was also \$1.7 million for the following year - a negative result of minus 16.3 per cent. That is what the Government did not give by way of grants to the Rottnest Island Authority to pay the wages that this Government’s union mates wanted. Under a coalition Government the purchase of non-current physical assets for 2000-01 cost \$2.665 million. In the first year of the Gallop Labor Government that was halved to \$1.33 million. The following year, in 2002-03, the amount allocated was \$884 000. How does the Government expect the Rottnest Island Authority to operate properly when it has been starved of funds? I am not saying it is the most efficient organisation in the world, and I am not saying it does not need to be looked into. In many ways I support the implementation of a business plan, but it must be done properly, efficiently and quickly. I am not suggesting that it should happen within five or six months, because we know that is just a delaying tactic so that this Government will not have to spend that money.

This Government has already said it will not fulfil its election commitment, which was very categorical. I will read it into *Hansard* yet again; I have already done so in two or three different speeches. Under the heading “tourism”, it states -

- ensure that \$14 million is allocated over four years to upgrade and repair holiday accommodation units and settlement areas on Rottnest;

This Government has not done that; it has spent but a pittance. The minister’s press release issued today, 26 November - this is another area of damage control - states -

“The issues raised by the Auditor General will play an important role in framing the terms of reference,” the Minister said.

He has not even told us what the terms of reference are; nobody has a clue, least of all the minister, because he will not be dealing with this - a bureaucrat will. The minister has not told us what the terms of reference will be, other than to develop a business plan. The report contains no specifics.

I could easily speak on this issue for an hour, but I will not do that, because today in this House there is an arrangement that after I have spoken, the minister will speak and we will then ask for the debate to be adjourned. A vote will not be taken on this issue because another very important item of private members’ business needs to be dealt with.

The press cuttings tell a very sad story about Rottnest Island. Every single press cutting is negative about one of Western Australia’s icon holiday resorts for Western Australians. It is not good enough for the minister to try to get out of this by setting up another task force as a delaying tactic. The member for Yokine has been the minister now for quite a few months. He says he has been over to Rottnest a couple of times - probably more - because he likes Rottnest.

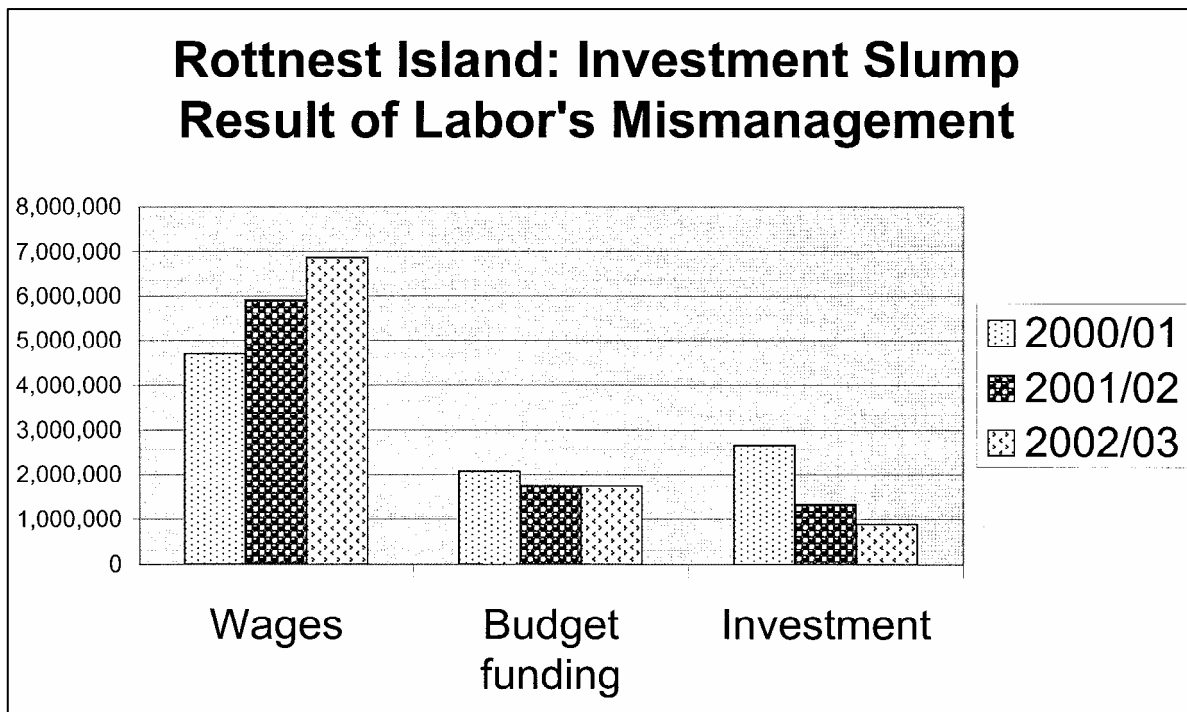
Mr Acting Speaker, I seek leave to have incorporated in *Hansard* some graphs and figures; they are important budget figures. Items such as these have been incorporated in *Hansard* before, so I am hoping you will allow me to do that.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.P. O’Gorman): The document can be incorporated into *Hansard*.

The following material was incorporated -

ROTTNEST ISLAND: LABOR'S MISMANAGEMENT STORY

Cash flow statement	2000/01 \$	2001/02 \$	2002/03 \$	Change 2000/01 to 2002/03 \$	Change 2000/01 to 2002/03 %
Employee costs	4,699,106	5,907,443	6,865,523	2,166,417	46.1%
Net cash from operating activities	1,968,934	-209,255	-378,527	-2,347,461	na
Net cash provided by government	2,067,836	1,727,753	1,730,000	-337,836	-16.3%
Purchase of non-current physical assets	2,665,209	1,330,283	884,329	-1,780,880	-66.8%



Mr R.F. JOHNSON: As I was saying earlier, I am fully aware that the minister has said that he loves Rottnest. He has said that quite a few times. I know that the minister went to Rottnest many years ago. It is interesting that someone has given me a copy of a Government Media Monitoring Unit transcript of an interview that the minister did a long time ago, back on 14 January 2001, on Radio 6PR on *The Way We Were* program with Peter Newman. In that interview, the minister talked about the time he had spent on Rottnest. I was not aware of this until I was given the transcript of that interview. The minister said -

We . . . my first posting, overseas actually, was to Rottnest.

I did not think anyone would class Rottnest as being overseas. I think it is part of Western Australia. However, the minister classed it as being overseas. The minister might well have been saying that tongue-in-cheek.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Get off the grass! You are a pompous prat!

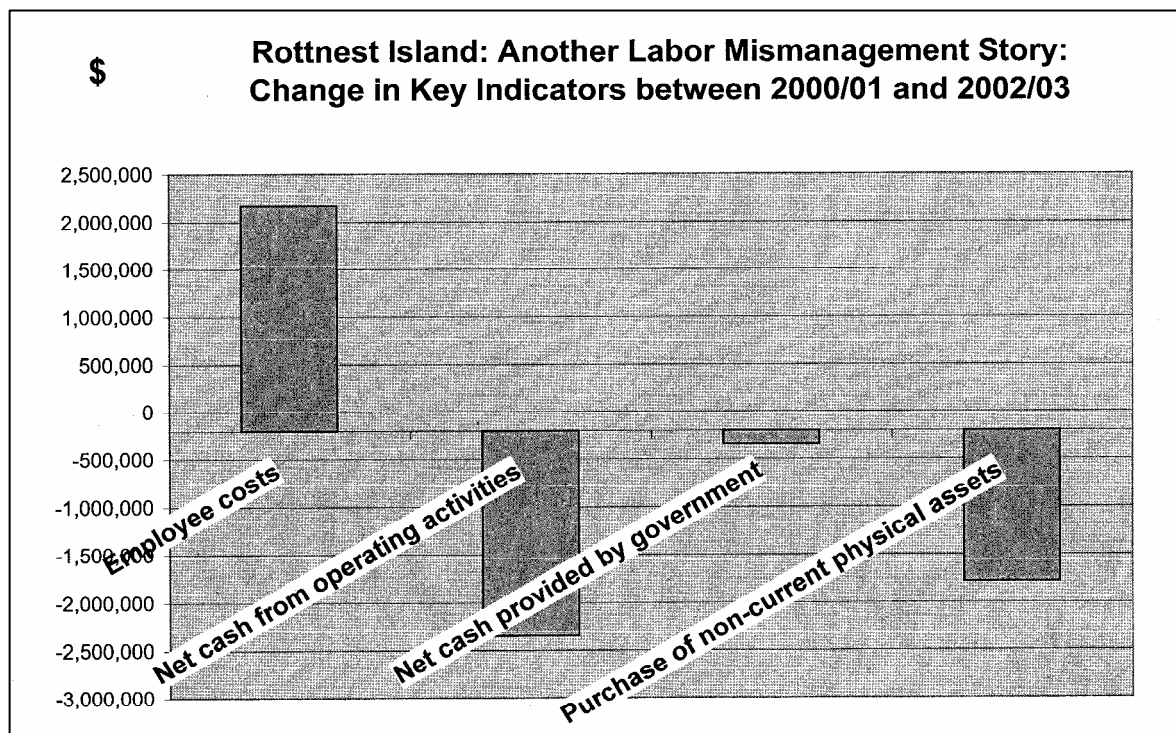
Withdrawal of Remark

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Mr Acting Speaker, I think it is against the code of conduct of this place to call a fellow member a pompous prat. I might have the same view about the minister, but I would not call him that in this House. I bring his comment to your attention and ask whether you consider it to be a contravention of standing orders in particular, and of the code of conduct.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Mr Acting Speaker, to save any further talk, I withdraw the comment.

Debate Resumed

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: This is important. The minister might not like my talking about what he said in that



interview, but it refers to the time when he was a police officer, and it also refers to Rottnest. As I said, when the minister said that his first posting overseas was Rottnest, he was probably saying that tongue-in-cheek. The minister was then asked -

Was that one of the sought after postings?

The minister said -

Well, not in those days . . . 'cause you got sent over there as a single man. In those days you had to tell everybody when you got married, you had to put a report in to get married, back in the '60s . . .

The interviewer then said -

... to get ... what, you said to seek approval ... ?

The minister then said -

... you had to seek approval ...

The interviewer then said -

... from the Police Commissioner?

The minister then said -

From the ... no, from your senior superintendent in those days, advising them that you were getting married, you know, to put what was called a P7 in, which is ... nowadays is a resignation form. So, anyway, I did that, and of course we didn't tell anybody for two reasons. Firstly, Susan worked for the PMG, or the Post Officer General ...

He went on to say -

... and if you told anybody that you were getting married you had to leave your job, so we got married in the June and in the October I went to Rottnest as the OIC, -

We have heard about how the minister was the officer in charge at not only Rottnest but also Belmont Police Station. I do not know for how long the minister was an officer in charge and of how many police establishments -

Ms M.M. Quirk: He has had a very distinguished career.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am sure he has, in the member's eyes. The important thing is that the minister continued by saying -

as a single man, and we didn't sort of tell anybody, and ... which is good, 'cause you used to get travelling allowances ...

That is interesting. The minister was not actually allowed to claim travelling allowance, because he was not single; he was married. A caller by the name of Lorraine then said -

I was just wondering, did I hear you right when you said that you were posted to Rottnest and you said you were a single man?

The minister then said -

Well, yes. We were married, and then I went there as a single ... well, when I say as a single man, you were married but you didn't tell your bosses.

The caller then said -

But then you said, I think I believe, that you had access to travelling money.

The minister then said -

Oh, they used to pay you travelling allowance for being there. At the time you were there I think we used to get about 12 shillings a day, or something ...

That was back in the 1960s. I ask the minister: was he being honest and open with his superiors? Was he telling the truth in those days? It certainly raises a question in my mind about whether the minister was being truthful. I am sure the minister will answer that when he gives his response. If he was not truthful in that situation, how can people accept what he says? I find it very disturbing.

I have spoken for just over 40 minutes. I could go on a lot longer, but I will almost immediately sit down and allow the minister to respond. I hope the minister will take no longer than 30 minutes so that we can adjourn this debate and move on to the next item.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Tourism) [4.46 pm]: It is interesting to note that the member for Hillarys has followed the Opposition's usual track of trying to involve one's family when dealing with issues in this House. I will not comment on that, other than to say that, 40 years ago, if a man did something, he could get his wife sacked, and his travelling allowance as a single man was less than if he was a married man. Perhaps if the member for Hillarys understood that, he would not be so pompous and involve one's family in parliamentary debates. That tradition has been well canvassed in this House over the years. The member for Hillarys was typically sarcastic. I will move on and deal with the issue of Rottnest Island, but I will do so without the nonsense used by the member for Hillarys in the debate.

I advise the member for Hillarys that the Irish Republican Army is not alive and well on Rottnest Island. In fact, I do not know of any terrorist groups on the island, other than the schoolies. For the information of the general

public in Western Australia, I do not know of any terrorist cells on Rottnest, nor am I aware of any people on the island who have Irish accents. Much of what the member for Hillarys said today is nonsense; however, we are used to that. The debate will now move on considerably.

The most important thing for the people of Western Australia to understand is that Rottnest is still a great place to go for a holiday, or a day trip, and that will continue to be the case. Rottnest Island is a Western Australian tourism industry icon, and under this Government, for the first time, a sustainable plan will emerge to ensure that that remains the case. The most important thing we must do is not talk down our great island for cheap political reasons. We must ensure that we do not stop people from enjoying the beauty and majesty of the island, which has been the way for many years. That way is under pressure, and for the first time a Government will move things forward instead of knee-jerking, making cosmetic changes and throwing money at things that are absolutely not needed, which is what the previous Government did.

Mr R.F. Johnson interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I will not take interjections. I make that quite clear.

Mr R.F. Johnson interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.P. O’Gorman): Order, member for Hillarys!

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, member for Mandurah!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The Gallop Government acted on its election commitment when it came to government by stopping privileged access to the Governor’s cottage, a measure that was practised, in particular, by the previous Court Government and its ministers. That practice was stopped on the first day we came to government. That was an issue.

The member for Hillarys referred to a list of key capital works that have been carried out each year. That list is not exhaustive, and those works continue to this day. The Government’s capital expenditure over four years to 5 June 2005 is \$8.1 million, and that does not include the \$1 million, approximately, for what the member for Hillarys trivialised as a windmill. That windmill is a wind generator similar to that on the wind farm in Albany, and it will reduce the island’s electricity bill by \$300 000. If that is not part of making the island sustainable, I do not know what is. The member for Hillarys simply trivialised the windmill and, again, that is typical of his attitude in this House.

Our RI 8 management plan is a vision for the next five years. The Auditor General makes it clear that it needs a business plan and an infrastructure plan to underpin it. Despite the usual sarcasm exhibited by the member for Hillarys, the trigger for the plan was when I came into this ministry as the Minister for Tourism. I met with the Rottnest Island Board over a month ago when I was apprised of some of the issues that are pressing the board. Some of those issues have been around for many years. I will go into them in a moment, but I will quote from some of the papers to which I referred yesterday. The manager of the island, Mr Easton, issued a press release in 1998 in which he said quite clearly that he was increasing the fees for landing on the island from \$4.50 to \$9.50, mooring charges for boats from \$24.50 per metre to \$50 per metre and the existing annual fee from \$40 to \$60. A whole raft of other fees and charges were increased. His statement was -

The increase in fees and charges will assist in funding the backlog in urgent works and ensure the proper preservation of this fragile and precious Western Australian asset.

The Rottnest Island Authority identified the cost of upgrading the island as being around \$66 million back in 1998. Nothing changed during the period of the previous Government because we are still faced with those kinds of things now.

The member for Hillarys referred to the Office of the Auditor General’s report on increased costs. The key increase in costs is quite clearly pointed out. Over 30 per cent of the costs are facility management fees which have increased by \$2.1 million from \$4.8 million to \$6.9 million in real terms. They comprise key increases in electricity costs of 59 per cent, water production of 245 per cent, cleaning services of 101 per cent and management fees of 52 per cent. A privatised system of contracts which the previous Government put in place supplies all those services. We have seen what has happened with privatised contracts. I refer members to contracts with Matrix and a whole raft of other contracts that were put in place. That is where the real costs come in.

Mr R.F. Johnson: The Under Treasurer came up with the Matrix deal.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I note the Under Treasurer was also involved in this one.

As was sarcastically pointed out earlier on, I have probably had a longer association with Rottnest Island than anyone else in this House. The State Government is meeting its commitments to Rottnest and more. Yesterday I tabled copies in this House of the previous Government's budget estimates, our budget estimates and the actual budget that has applied since we came into government. The original commitment was predicated on the Opposition's previous budget papers for the 2000-01 financial year which anticipated a capital contribution of \$1.5 million from Rottnest Island, adding up to \$6 million over four years. The State Government would then inject an additional \$8 million over the term of the Government, bringing the total to \$14 million.

As we know, Rottnest Island's financial position has deteriorated. The Rottnest Island Board has been unable to make the contribution, mainly because the cost of continually repairing the ageing infrastructure is eating up the money that should have been spent on a properly maintained and sensible business plan for the constant renewal of the tourist facilities on the island. For the member for Hillarys to suggest that a wind generation turbine is not involved in holiday facilities is an absolute nonsense. There is no point in people having cottages if they cannot turn the lights on. The Government has embarked on major works. It is coming together. An amount of \$550 000 will be spent to increase desalination capacity to significantly reduce reliance upon underground freshwater supplies.

Mr R.F. Johnson: We put one in.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: There are now two. Perhaps the member for Hillarys will see that when he eventually gets to the island.

An amount of \$500 000 has already been spent to upgrade the Caroline Thomson cabins, \$125 000 on the heritage signal station, \$500 000 as part of an ongoing program to remove asbestos from the island, and \$125 000 to upgrade the Geordie Bay shopping precinct. I could go on and on. It is likely that the Government will actually exceed the original \$14 million commitment to Rottnest Island. For the very first time, this Government is doing what no other Government has done by providing real support for the provision of infrastructure services on the island in terms of power, water, sewerage and conservation and heritage.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You have already cut it by \$2 million. What hypocrisy!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The member for Hillarys should have some manners. He should not keep interrupting. Freeing the island from this burden will allow the Rottnest Island Authority to concentrate on tourism and accommodation businesses. I announced on Saturday the formation of a Rottnest Island task force to develop an urgent plan to make sure that we can deal with the basic infrastructure on the island. Despite all the rubbish spoken by the member for Hillarys, the task force process is absolutely vital. The Auditor General recommended that this process start immediately and that it report back as soon as possible so that we can make sure that we start to put in place the recommendations that are in the report that came out today. Again, much of this was flagged in the Rottnest Island Authority's annual report. Many of the issues were raised with me when I met with board members. The board undertook to make sure that I had these things in place. The board and the management of the island need to get on with the business of running the island during the busiest time that it faces for the next 12 month. In the meantime, the task force will return and will give the Government and me clear directions for the provision of services on the island. The Auditor General flagged some \$50 million that is needed over a five-year period to do away with a legacy of neglect, decades in the making, that has left the island's accommodation and infrastructure in a dilapidated condition. That has occurred under successive Governments. I will not look backwards. I will not say what the previous Government did or did not do. I am not interested in that. I am interested in getting on with the job and making sure that Rottnest Island is returned to its iconic status.

The costings for the \$50 million have been supplied by the Rottnest Island Authority. We need to bring together a range of experts from within government utilities who know what these things cost, not a group of private consultants or a private contractor. We need a group made up of government experts who supply these same services to almost every town in Western Australia, except Rottnest Island. Members can go to Nullagine, Marble Bar and anywhere else in Western Australia and find that the services are supplied by public utilities. I am advised that the one place that does not happen is Rottnest Island.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Can I make a suggestion?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I have told members that I will not take interjections. The costings have been supplied and need to be verified.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.P. O'Gorman): Order, member for Warren-Blackwood! We have had a fairly considered debate with few interruptions from either side. I would like to try to keep the House in that sort of order.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. A number of reports have identified capital injections from anywhere between \$30 million and \$66 million under the previous Government. It is about time we homed in on that and made sure what the Government needs to pay out and how it is able to provide that funding. It may well be that if we are able to change the direction and way in which services are delivered on Rottneest Island, it will become totally sustainable into the future and this will allow the tourism side of the island to get on with the business of supplying tourism facilities.

The financial performance of the island has deteriorated over the past five years. I could talk about a number of issues but I am mindful of the time and of an arrangement I have made with the Leader of the National Party for him to have sit in the Speaker's gallery a family to listen to the debate on order of the day No 35. Rather than simply throw money at the problem, we must approach this in a planned and structured way. I have asked the task force to consider a number of matters. I will go through them because it is important to put them on the record. It will deliver an infrastructure plan for Rottneest Island that addresses issues in the following order and priority: issues of health and safety, environmental degradation, and other matters consistent with the existing management plan. On that matter, Rottneest Island is the only place where all those elements must be applied. The member for Hillarys said that tourists who visit Mandurah are not expected to pay for the tourism infrastructure. Of course they are not. That is the fundamental problem with Rottneest Island, which must be dealt with. The task force will identify for the State Government the infrastructure needs of the island so that the Government does not vacillate between spending \$30 million or \$66 million or any other amount. The Government will know exactly what amount is required. I will want, and the Government will require, advice on practical and sustainable solutions for the maintenance and repair of infrastructure in a sensible, planned and managed way over at least the next five years, as the Office of the Auditor General has recommended. That arrangement must be locked in place to be consistent. Whatever Government follows, whether it is this Government or any other Government, it will be locked into that infrastructure process. We also need to consider the current structure of the Rottneest Island Authority with a view to determining whether it has the skills and expertise that are required to run a complex commercial organisation. We must make sure that the task force's report is delivered to me no later than April 2004, which is four months into the next year. I look forward to working with the task force to deliver an action plan for Rottneest Island that will return it to sustainability.

I ask all members opposite to note the words of the Auditor General today. The most important paragraph in his entire report says that the turnaround needed to secure a sustainable future for Rottneest Island is significant and challenging and that achieving it will require the collective engagement of Parliament, the Rottneest Island Authority and the community. I repeat, of Parliament, the Rottneest Island Authority and the community. I have no doubt that the Rottneest Island Authority will rise to the occasion and I have no doubt that the community will make sure that Rottneest Island is sustained. However, I have some doubts about the Parliament doing that. I will call on the member for Hillarys, as the opposition spokesperson, to make sure that he works with the Government in a bipartisan way. Whatever Government is elected in the future, whether it is in three, 10 or 15 years, it will be faced with sustaining the magical isle, which is Rottneest Island. I ask the member to commit to work with me. I have offered to take him to the island. I ask the member to make a commitment to work with me.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I will be very happy to go. I would sooner not go with you, but the Leader of the Opposition and I will go there.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Make a commitment to work with me.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Don't be stupid. How can I work with you when you don't listen to what I say?

Mr R.C. KUCERA: It is obvious that the member does not want to make a commitment. He will prevaricate and duck and weave like he usually does. The member owes this to the community.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You do. You are the minister. You are in charge of the purse strings at the moment.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Much has been made by the member for Hillarys that I love Rottneest Island. I do love Rottneest Island. My association with it probably goes back further than any other member in this House. It is a magical place. However, it is a magical place that needs some stardust sprinkled on it by this Government. This Government will support the island.

I have looked back at the cosmetic nature of the changes that were made by the previous Government. This is the final comment I will make on the financial arrangements of the former Government. The member for Hillarys made much about building the sewerage plant. What did the former Government do to the Rottneest Island Authority to achieve that? It left a debt legacy of \$4.7 million. It did not put in any extra money. When the sewerage system broke down and the situation reached crisis point, the Government told the authority to borrow money to fix it. We are still paying off almost \$5 million of debt as a result of the previous

Government's actions. I have thrown up the challenge to the member for Hillarys to work with this Government, as the Auditor General recommended, in a bipartisan way with the community of Western Australia to ensure our magical island is preserved.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Mr A.D. Marshall.