

BRIAN WILLIAM EDWARDS, TRANSFER TO MINIMUM-SECURITY PRISON

15. Ms S.E. WALKER to the Minister for Justice:

I refer to the minister's admission reported in *The West Australian* today and on ABC radio this morning that both the previous Minister for Justice and the current Attorney General signed the executive council documents supporting the transfer of the double murderer Brian William Edwards to a minimum-security prison.

- (1) Now that it has been revealed that the Premier also signed documentation authorising the transfer of Edwards to a minimum-security prison, will the minister advise the house why he concealed this information from the public?
- (2) How can the public have any confidence in the minister's proposed inquiry when already he has been exposed for protecting the Premier's involvement in this disgraceful saga, rather than providing a full, honest and open explanation?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO replied:

(1)-(2) I was waiting for a question -

Ms S.E. Walker: You're guilty; that's why.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I have been in this job only two and a half weeks and I have been as open as possible. I think I have spoken to every media outlet and I have answered every question that has been put to me. In the two and a half weeks of this crisis, I have been as open and accountable as possible.

Mr P.D. Omodei: So you made a mistake?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: No; no mistake at all. Let me put on the record the opposition's performance on this matter. Prerelease programs have been in place since 1981. Not only that, in the period between 1991 and 2000, 60 applications for these programs were approved by the opposition when it was in government.

Mr M.J. Birney: Did they all escape?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I will get to the escapes in a moment.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Were they all murderers?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: All 60 were murderers, rapists and people who needed special approval.

Mr M.J. Birney: Why don't you deal with the question of why you didn't tell people yesterday that the Premier signed off on this?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Is it not amazing? Members opposite do not want -

Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Leschenault to order for the second time.

Mr M.J. Birney: Just tell us why you didn't tell people that the Premier signed off?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Members opposite do not like to hear the truth. Let me put this matter in context again. In 1998-99 there were 41 escapes from the two prisons we have spoken about. Members opposite have criticised my predecessor, yet in 2003-04 there were 12 escapes from the same two prisons.

Mr M.J. Birney: Catapult yourself into this century!

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: When the minister in the previous government was asked a question about the escapes, he tried to redefine the word "escape". Let me quote Peter Foss. In 1998 he said -

The term "escape" is unique to Western Australia for such places as Karnet. In other places in the world and in the eastern States people do not refer to it as an escape because to be able to escape a prisoner first of all must be confined.

That was the previous government's answer. When it was faced with this problem, what did it do? It redefined the word "escape". What is this government going to do? It will actually do something. In my first two and a half weeks as minister, I asked for the definition to be looked at again. This government has appointed a new director of prisons and it has announced a major inquiry. Yesterday, with the approval of the Premier, we announced that security fences would be placed around our minimum-security prisons. Compared with the record of the opposition, the record of this government is outstanding. Members opposite should not criticise us, because they do not know what they are talking about.