

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE INFILL SEWERAGE SCHEME

Establishment - Motion

Resumed from 23 October on the following motion moved by Mr P.D. Omodei -

- (1) That a select committee of the Legislative Assembly be established to inquire into and report on the impact of the State Labor Government's decision to curtail the infill sewerage scheme in Western Australia, and in particular -
 - (a) the impact on the environment including the pollution of rivers, lakes and estuarine environs;
 - (b) the impact on small business and their capacity to pay sewerage rates;
 - (c) the impact on the contracting and plumbing industry in regional Western Australia;
 - (d) the impact on regional development;
 - (e) whether there should be a community service obligation - CSO - to alleviate the impact on rural towns as a result of the Government's decision;
 - (f) any matter relating to the Government's decision whereby the communities in Western Australia are unfairly impacted upon; and
 - (g) recommend any changes, including positive legislative, administrative and policy changes to give effect to an equitable policy for infill sewerage in Western Australia.
- (2) That the committee present its final report to the Legislative Assembly by 30 April 2003.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont - Treasurer) [4.01 pm]: When we last debated this motion, I outlined to the House the pressures on our capital works program, both generally and within the Water Corporation. I also indicated that there is a limit on the capital works program that can be undertaken which is set by the limit on our borrowings. I further indicated that the infill sewerage program has not been abandoned, although the program will now be completed over 15 years rather than 10 years.

I will respond to two other issues that were raised by the member for Warren-Blackwood. The member suggested that we might need to consider making community service obligation payments to country towns in which the infill sewerage program was proceeding more slowly than was originally planned. I refer the member for Warren-Blackwood to page 184 of budget paper No 3 of 2002-03, *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*. It contains a table dealing with expenses from the Government to public corporations. It shows that the current community service obligation payment to the Water Corporation for country water sewerage and drainage operations is \$163.529 million. There is already a CSO for the infill sewerage program of \$20.120 million, and rural irrigation schemes attract a CSO of \$10.613 million. In addition, there is a CSO for pensioner and senior concessions of \$63.6 million. I expect that a proportion of that pensioner and senior concession CSO is paid to country areas. In pointing out those figures in the budget papers, I am illustrating the extensive nature of our community service obligations to the Water Corporation. It can be seen from those figures that our budget arrangements already contain a very significant subsidy for country water sewerage and drainage operations of \$163.5 million. Given the pressures on our budget, I do not think it would be possible to increase that community service obligation payment.

The second point to which I want to respond relates to the member's overall argument for a select committee. As members know, this House has reformed the committee structure. It deliberately moved away from a system of ad hoc select committees to a system of standing committees. That change was supported by both sides of the House. It flowed from recommendations of the Select Committee on Procedure and the later Procedure and Privileges Committee. The object of the exercise is for members to become more routinely familiar with operations in particular portfolios, thus over time building a body of expertise within the House about the particular portfolios, and ensuring continuity of member attention to particular portfolios. That is considered better than the ad hoc arrangements that result from select committees. Although I do not see the need for an inquiry into the infill sewerage program - I have put before the House the Government's commitment to continue that program, albeit over a 15-year period rather than a 10-year period - I would be particularly opposed to a select committee inquiry because that would undermine the standing committee reform in which we have engaged. If the member for Warren-Blackwood wishes a standing committee to pursue this issue, he could take it up with the chair of the most relevant committee or with one of the coalition members on that committee and see whether it would be prepared to conduct an inquiry into or at least some investigation of the infill sewerage program. I do not believe it is necessary from a policy point of view. However, the member may have a different approach, and I refer him to the chair of the relevant standing committee. I think that the committee

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chaired by the member for Riverton is the most likely committee to be involved with this issue, although other committees might also have an interest.

For the reasons I have outlined, the Government will not support this motion. We do not believe an inquiry into the infill sewerage program is necessary. I put the facts on the parliamentary record the last time this matter was debated. However, if members wish to see some further scrutiny of this issue, the matter can be taken up with the relevant standing committee of this House.

MR B.K. MASTERS (Vasse) [4.07 pm]: I am very pleased to stand in this place and offer my support for the motion to establish a select committee on the infill sewerage scheme. It is important that we go back to 1993, when the Richard Court Government was freshly elected, and ask why the scheme was implemented.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Who thought of it?

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I must admit that I do not know. Maybe someone could tell me by way of interjection.

Mr P.G. Pandal: It is a very good policy idea from 1992.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Was it? I must have had a hand in it, but I cannot remember. However, I will take some of the glory.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Perhaps they knew what you would be producing.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: That is a profound statement from the minister. As I recall, the scheme was set up for two primary reasons. The first was that the State was emerging from the negative economic conditions brought about by the recession we had to have, courtesy of Paul Keating, that illustrious Prime Minister of Australia. The second reason was the need to shake off the economic downturn that flowed from the disastrous WA Inc years of the former Australian Labor Party Government. In 1992-93, prior to the election of the Richard Court Government, things were tough. Unemployment and inflation were high. There were many problems. We had lost our AAA credit rating. Things were not promising. Therefore, we developed an \$800 million program that would significantly help get the economy up and running. Of course, we had restrictions, as it would have been dangerous to try to overstimulate the economy by using too much money from borrowings or cash flow in that way. That is my recollection of one of the very important reasons the scheme was implemented.

The member for South Perth has alluded to the second reason; namely, that there would be some very important on-the-ground benefits. First, environmental benefits would flow from the scheme. Secondly, there would be health benefits. It is a pity that the Minister for Health seemed to be making light of this issue, but there would definitely be health benefits in areas that converted from septic tanks to infill deep sewerage. Thirdly, there would be developmental land-use benefits. I will seek to explain those three aspects in a little more detail.

The environmental benefits would arise because septic tanks by their very nature are not designed to be environmentally friendly. They concentrate the bulk of the solids that leave a property. They trap them in the first of two septic tanks. The water that flows over the top of the solids goes into the second septic tank where some solid material settles out. The overflow from the second septic tank goes into one or two leach drains. By a process of evaporation and infiltration into the soil structure the liquid is disposed of. Over time solids build up in the first septic tank. When septic tanks are full, people suffer from drains that do not drain and toilets that do not flush. They end up having to call in a septic tanker, which costs a couple of hundred dollars, for the removal of the solids from the two tanks.

Because it is an old and fairly crude system, it is not all that good at removing nutrients or some of the pathogens from the waste water that goes down into the leach drains. The main nutrients are phosphorous and nitrogen. To diminish the amount of nitrogen that goes into ground water or surface streams, certain environmental conditions need to apply so that denitrifying bacteria can do their thing and return the nitrogen to the atmosphere. Phosphorous, which is often the cause of algal blooms and other problems in waterways, is generally much harder to remove. Some of it is trapped on the outside of fine particles of clay that might be within the soil profile and some phosphorous might be trapped in or chemically react with the lime sand that occurs in some of the coastal dunes. Even if there is some reduction of nutrients and pathogens, eventually septic tanks by definition must fail. Eventually they put nutrients and pathogens into either ground water or surface water. By removing those nutrients and pathogens from the septic system and converting black water and grey water in a large waste water treatment plant, the system ends up virtually eliminating those small but insidious and cumulative impacts that would otherwise occur on the environment. The more that septic tanks are converted into infill sewerage, the more benefits will accrue.

I have talked about the health benefits to a certain degree. If the leachate is taken away, pathogens clearly have no ability to get into the water system to be picked up later on, for example, by a bore that might be used for watering a garden or, in some areas, domestic water supplies. The Department of Environmental Protection

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regulations demand separation distances of up to 100 metres between a septic tank system in which waste goes out and any bore from which water of any sort will be extracted. The separation distance might vary to as close as 50 metres, but my recollection is that depending on soil conditions it can be as much as 100 metres. Septic tanks therefore pose a clear health risk. Infill sewerage totally removes that risk.

The last benefit I mentioned was developmental land use. In country Western Australia in particular and also in certain parts of metropolitan Perth, it is not possible to develop further land because of the low lying or flood prone nature of that land, unless infill sewerage is provided. If septic tanks were put into those areas, because of the clay rich conditions of the subsoil or the shallow water table of those areas, all that would happen in winter with even a rainfall equivalent to the relatively low rainfall that we are currently experiencing is that the water table would rise above the surface of the ground, and leachate and sometimes solids and other nasties would rise to the surface. It is clearly unacceptable to have children playing in that sort of environment where their health would be at risk. Pets would be potentially affected. The nutrients would move with the surface water and more readily go down into the natural environment. Large numbers of suburbs and towns are affected - for example Donnybrook and Boyanup, to name two that I am aware of in the south west. The member for Warren-Blackwood might know if Manjimup falls into that category, but it would not surprise me if many towns in the higher rainfall areas of the south west could not have land use developments because of the absence of deep sewerage.

The motion specifically discusses environmental and developmental benefits arising from the infill sewerage program. That is contained in paragraph (a), which states -

the impact on the environment including the pollution of rivers, lakes and estuarine environs;

Paragraph (d) states -

the impact on regional development;

If the Government were offering its support for this motion, I would have gone to the member for Warren-Blackwood and suggested an amendment to the motion so that the need to understand the health benefits arising from the infill sewerage program could have been added to the motion so that a select committee could have looked at both the negative side of health risks increasing, should there be a continued reduction of the infill sewerage program, and also the converse, which is the health benefits that would have accrued had the infill sewerage program been rejuvenated to its original expenditure levels.

To make absolutely sure that anyone who is listening in this place or who reads *Hansard* later on does understand the benefits that would accrue from a continuation of the infill sewerage program at the level of expenditure that pertained prior to this Government's election, I will give briefly a few examples from my electorate of the environmental health and developmental benefits that would have accrued from the infill sewerage program but which we will now miss out on, at least in the short term, if the program does not go ahead. The environmental benefits include the reduction of nutrients going into the Busselton wetlands, Geographe Bay and the Port Geographe development. Those members who know Busselton will know that the townsite is a long, narrow, coastal development behind which is an almost continuous chain of wetlands. Those wetlands are being and will continue to be negatively impacted on by nutrients that are coming out of septic tanks and flowing inland to eutryfy or otherwise impact upon those wetlands. Some of the wetlands are of international significance. The Vasse-Wonnerup Estuary, for example, is listed on the Ramsar Convention Bureau list of wetlands of international importance, as is the Broadwater wetland. However, there are many other wetlands behind Busselton. By "behind" I mean literally within tens of metres of roads and urban property boundaries. The quicker that septic tanks can be converted into infill sewerage in those areas, the fewer the nutrients going into those wetlands and the better quality they will be in the short and long term.

Mr E.S. Ripper: What do you think of the alternatives to septic tanks that are not traditional septic tanks? Do you have any feelings about those at all?

Mr B.K. MASTERS: The Treasurer makes a very good point, and I do have some faith in some of them. I cannot remember the names and details of all of them, but there are Ecomax, Biocycle and Biomax. Basically, five or six different systems have been authorised for use by the Department of Health in low-lying areas where there is a susceptibility for nutrients to leach out of the wetlands or into places such as Geographe Bay. They require more maintenance and monitoring by health department or environmental health officers from local government bodies. One system must have chlorine tablets applied at certain times of the year to ensure that disinfected water comes out.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Another one has air pumped into it.

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Mr B.K. MASTERS: Yes, air must be pumped in; therefore, the aeration system must have electricity for the pumps to work. In another system the leachate water goes into a modified Alcoa red mud, which has a very high capacity to absorb phosphorus. Because it is normally above the ground, it gets good aeration, and that encourages the denitrifying bacteria to put the nitrogen back into the atmosphere. No water is able to escape into the surrounding environment, so there are no health impacts. All those systems are very good. However, it would be interesting to do a cost-benefit analysis to see whether it is cheaper per quarter acre block or per urban housing site for infill sewerage as opposed to some of these aerobic treatment units. Does the Treasurer have the figures in his head?

Mr E.S. Ripper: No, I do not. I think it would be interesting to explore the relative costs. However, I take the point that you are making. Sometimes the maintenance obligations on the resident would mean that he could not be confident that they would perform well.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Certainly that is the concern that has been put to me over the years. When a person buys one system - I think it is Biocycle - he or she also buys a maintenance contract from the company that supplies the system, so that every six or 12 months the person pays for someone to check the system and ensure that it is working up to standard. That of course absolves the local government authority of the need to send its environmental health officer around to double-check, because I presume that the company that sells the system advises the local government body for the respective area that the system has been checked, it is working okay and there is no need to worry for the next 12 months.

There is also the point that the Water Corporation prefers to have a large waste water treatment plant that is capable of guaranteeing a very high level of treatment for everyone's grey and black water; in other words, everyone's domestic sewage. It is an argument that I do not think we will ever win or lose, because it is a very subjective matter. It is an individual aerobic treatment unit, with all the problems or issues that that imposes, versus an infill sewerage program, which is a big engineering facility that has lots of pipes and pumping stations and then the waste water treatment system. Obviously that is a very complex and costly system. All these issues must be balanced. There are places in which it would be far more cost-effective to put in an aerobic treatment unit and there are other areas such as metropolitan Perth and Busselton, which has a reasonably large urban community, in which a single waste water treatment plant operated by the Water Corporation is a preferable way to go. However, it is horses for courses.

On the environmental benefits in my electorate, quite a lot of properties front onto Geographe Bay in Busselton, Dunsborough and even where I live at Peppermint Grove Beach. The nutrients from those septic tanks go straight out into Geographe Bay once the septic tanks cease to be effective. Of course, that has implications for the quality of seagrasses, fish and a whole range of things in Geographe Bay.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I think I have outlined the health benefits already. In, for example, Siesta Park and the Abbey area west of Busselton, many people depend on the surficial or surface ground water layers to water their lawns and keep their gardens going. In the past they had to rely on the surface ground water to supplement their domestic water supplies. Clearly, if a septic tank is too close to the bores that pull water out of those surface water layers, there will be a very significant risk of introducing pathogens. There are problems in Europe where excess levels of nitrate in the ground water are causing health problems. I understand that babies in particular who are drinking water that is very high in nitrate can develop a condition called blue baby. I do not know the medical side of it, but obviously it upsets the physiology of a human being when he or she is very young and is susceptible to changes in the quality of the water or food that is consumed. Some areas in Busselton still have health implications from the continued use of septic tanks; therefore, it is important that the infill sewerage program continue for that reason if for no other.

Finally, some areas of my electorate cannot further develop urban land because of the lack of infill sewerage. That will cause a number of land developments to go on the backburner. The foremost development is in the Capel town site. I am aware of two genuine farmers - to call them developers is a little unfair - who happen to have had urban development creep up to the boundaries of their farming properties. Their rates have now gone through the roof because of the increase in property values. Basically, they are being forced to look at land subdivision as a way of getting a reasonably economic return from their land. Both landowners have been told that they cannot develop their land in the Capel town site because there will be no more infill sewerage at least for the foreseeable future. Capel is a special town. The fact that I have lived in it for almost a year and have chosen to live in the Capel shire only a few kilometres from the Capel town site confirms in my mind that Capel is one community in which the urban blocks of land that are for sale are very good value for money. Therefore, it is popular with retirees and young families who are buying or building their first homes. Yet one of the consequences of this Government's decision not to allow infill sewerage to occur in the town for at least another

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couple of years will both restrict the availability of these budget priced blocks and push up the value of the remaining vacant blocks within the town site. The Capel town site is just one example.

Even in the centre of Busselton around an area known as Heseltine Park, a controversy has gone on for some time about where a pumping station might be located. That is a side issue that I do not wish to discuss. People have come to me and said that so long as the pumping station is located on a site where it will have minimal impact on the majority of people, the Water Corporation should get on and do it, because they want to develop or extend their houses or build duplexes and they cannot do so because the infill sewerage program is being delayed in that part of Busselton. One would think that Busselton is an area that does not need a great deal of infill sewerage because it is well developed and so on. However, the reality is that in areas that do not have infill sewerage and instead rely on septic tanks, clear restrictions are being placed on people's reasonable expectations and needs for land use development.

The final example I will give is the Port Geographe development, which is rapidly turning into a very good development for those people who wish to live next to the water on a canal estate. Port Geographe could not have gone ahead unless infill sewerage was provided to all 400 or 500 housing lots that have been, or are yet to be, created around it. The reason for that is that infill sewerage is much more efficient and effective at protecting environmental health values and providing benefits in those areas. If Port Geographe had gone ahead with the proposed septic tanks as a way of treating domestic refuse, it would have been knocked back by the Department of Environmental Protection or the Environmental Protection Authority.

This motion to appoint a select committee moved by the member for Warren-Blackwood is important. As I have outlined, the sewerage infill program has significant ramifications for my electorate. The benefits to my constituents would not be trivial. If those ramifications are applied to areas in which infill sewerage will not proceed, it is obvious that the Government's decision will have long-term negative implications. For that reason I support the motion.

MR A.D. McRAE (Riverton) [4.30 pm]: As this is the first time I have had an opportunity to speak today, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr Dean), I seek your indulgence to begin my remarks by noting my respect for Jimmy Pike, a renowned Kimberley artist, who passed away a day or so ago. I am wearing one of Jimmy Pike's desert design ties. He was a remarkable man who not only made an extraordinary contribution by demonstrating how he could reform his own life, but also contributed to the artistic endeavours of the broader community and the Aboriginal community, of which he was a respected leader and elder.

Several government members: Hear, hear!

Mr A.D. McRAE: I support the sentiments in the motion moved by the member for Warren-Blackwood. I agree with the importance that the motion places on the state infill sewerage program. I also support the need to develop a bipartisan approach to the importance the infill sewerage program has for this State. In the triple bottom line analysis it has social, environmental and economic benefits that are of great value and importance to the State. As preceding members have done, I acknowledge the contribution of some of the more senior members of the House in developing this scheme, particularly the member for South Perth, who was a member of the Liberal Party and opposition spokesman on the environment when it was first developed. He picked up some key issues and, like all ideas whose time for implementation has come, he was able to weld together an economic imperative - a bit of good old-fashioned pump priming - with a real environmental need. When the merging of those priorities and motives can come together, programs are implemented that ultimately produce a great, long-term and widespread benefit for the people of this State. This motion contains some very positive elements. This infill program has some good history attached to it. Current members, previous members and at least a few different Governments have contributed to it. The Government, however, has a slightly different view about how to approach this issue. Without being overly combative about it, I will address a couple of points.

The Deputy Premier rightly pointed out that the previous Government, supported by the Labor Party then in opposition, established in this place a system of standing committees. I am Chairperson of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee, and I imagine that my committee would have the broad policy responsibility for examining this matter. I disagree with the member's proposition that this matter should be examined by a select committee. I support the system of standing committees. They are well able to carry out whatever inquiry is necessary on behalf of this House. Without blowing my committee's trumpet too hard, it has form in this area, for example, on the Bellevue inquiry, the first inquiry conducted by any standing committee of this House, which was referred by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. It is a very good example of how members from both sides of politics can work together on a potentially highly contentious, complex issue. That issue had a long history of involvement by various Governments and a number of agencies with policy and administrative responsibility for it. The Economics and Industry Standing Committee made some very decent

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recommendations and pointed observations about failings within the administration of the State. In the very short period of the life of the present standing committees, a basis has been developed for good bipartisan approaches to issues of critical importance to the State.

Mr J.H.D. Day: Would you support an amendment to this motion to refer the issue to the Economics and Industry Standing Committee?

Mr A.D. McRAE: I know that the member for Darling Range and Deputy Chairman of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee would like to examine this matter.

Mr J.H.D. Day: It is important.

Mr A.D. McRAE: It is important, but, as I said, without being too combative about it, based on the way this motion is framed, now is not the time to refer the matter to the standing committee of which I am chairperson. In due course, we might need to come back to it. I would be happy to have this discussion with the Deputy Premier, the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, the member for Darling Range and other members to see whether we can do something. I do not support this proposition for a number of good reasons.

In spite of our desire to operate in a perfect world, we operate within a parliamentary system that must balance priorities. There is no question that our Government came to power on the back of setting education, health and community safety as clear, outstanding priorities for which we are unapologetic. That has meant sacrifices in a number of areas. For example, this Government reduced the number of ministers from 17 to 14. Travel approvals have been reduced and the number of consultants engaged by government has been reduced. Those reductions have been made to allow greater focus on delivering this Government's priorities. It is an appropriate set of priorities. There will always be capacity for critique and constructive criticism. Broadly speaking, those priorities are right, our engagement with the community is right and the way we have diverted moneys into those priority areas is right. That is not to say that within the total context of examining priorities we should not continually review and understand the distribution of the State's resources. The Deputy Premier referred to a table in budget paper No 3.

Mr B.K. Masters interjected.

Mr A.D. McRAE: I did not interject on the member for Vasse during his remarks. I made no interjections or remarks while anyone was on their feet. That was the decent thing to do in the very constrained time we have to put our perspective on this issue, although at other times I would be happy to engage in discussion.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

Mr A.D. McRAE: I think I made my point clear. I am being as generous as I can and I will continue my remarks.

I will refer to a matter mentioned by the Treasurer and Deputy Premier in budget paper No 3, *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, in particular appendix 6, table 2, on page 184 relating to the Water Corporation's forward estimates budget allocation and the comparison with the preceding years' estimated actual expenditure at the time of printing the budget papers. On that page the subtotals for the Water Corporation cover all manner of things, such as country water, sewerage and drainage operations, the infill sewerage program, pensioner and senior concessions, rural irrigation schemes, partial reimbursement of proceeds from the sale of surplus land and the Burrup water supply system. The estimated actual expenditure for those projects in 2001-02 was \$238 million; in 2002-03, \$258 million; in 2003-04, \$276 million; in 2004-05, \$281 million; and in 2005-06, \$296 million. There will, therefore, be no reduction but, rather, a continual increase in the forward estimate projections of the total amount allocated.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

Mr A.D. McRAE: The member is correct, all those funds are not going to the infill sewerage program. As has already been said, the Government is extending the time in which the program will be delivered from 10 years to 15 years. There is no loss of program but, rather, an extension of the time it will take to complete. Why is the Government doing that? Members opposite know. I will not teach them anything because they have been in this place a lot longer than I have.

Mr P.D. Omodei: You can say that again!

Mr A.D. McRAE: That is correct, and I will probably be here after the member for Warren-Blackwood has left!

Mr P.D. Omodei: Just be grateful that I won't be campaigning in your electorate!

Mr A.D. McRAE: The member for Warren-Blackwood is welcome to. I reckon I could increase my vote if he did!

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Mr M.F. Board: It's going to get pretty crowded over there!

Mr A.D. McRAE: Is the member for Murdoch coming too?

Mr C.J. Barnett: I might run against you; that would be good.

Mr A.D. McRAE: Member for Cottesloe, I am getting excited now. I can just see my aged retirement from this place coming up!

The extension of time is not about the turfing out of a very good program. This Government has acknowledged that it is a fantastic program. The extension of time is about fitting it into the priorities that the Government has set and that the people of WA expect us to stick to.

I want to refer to two other points of interest surrounding this matter. Western Australia's Water Symposium was held in this Chamber from 7 to 9 October 2002. I raise this matter because it provides an insight into the broader issues that confront us with water use, water retention, water recycling and waste water management. This is important because we must understand that it has an even broader context than its relevance to health, education and community safety. It also has a context in water supply and sewerage management.

In their final commentary, the symposium delegates produced a long and comprehensive list of strategies that must be pursued. One strategy in particular suggests that we must do a little more work to understand the full range of options available to us for sewerage infill and the motive for that strategy. The motive is no longer only about the capital works program; it is also about the best environmental management of the infill sewerage program. One recommendation from the symposium, at page 3 of volume 1 of the summary of outcomes, states -

The Water Conservation Strategy should incorporate the following high priority components: -

- continued application of 2 days per week sprinkler use but extended to all users including bores;
- re-use of waste water;
- increase research and promotion of use of greywater;
- program for widespread adoption of water sensitive urban design including retrofit to existing suburbs with a view to implementing changes to legally enforceable planning policy;
- strategies to increase domestic/industry/agriculture water use efficiency;
- and
- stormwater re-use;

Mr P.D. Omodei: None of those things has anything to do with sewerage.

Mr A.D. McRAE: They do.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Rainwater is not sewerage.

Mr A.D. McRAE: The member for Warren-Blackwood has misunderstood a lot of the debate that is now going on around grey water reuse and the separating out of what is now a single stream discharge from households into at least two streams. That is important because we must reduce the impact on the environment of the total discharge from urban build-ups.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Just put a dual system into all the new suburbs.

Mr A.D. McRAE: There are plenty of good examples of that happening already. Indeed, the Master Plumbers' and Gasfitters Association of WA in conjunction with Murdoch University has done some very interesting research into this matter. I commend the research to the member for Warren-Blackwood. If he wants to get hold of the people involved in that research, I am happy to pass on the names. The research indicates that a single-issue approach to a problem that has many facets to it no longer fits the bill. We must be a bit more clever than that. Although the Government will maintain its strategy on the infill program, now extended over 15 years instead of 10 years, it is also clear that the mechanisms and responses used to deal with waste water management must be broadened.

I will close my remarks by saying that I agree with the Government's view that this is not an appropriate motion to support. I have said that I am prepared to engage in a longer-term discussion about how to build bipartisan support for not only the infill sewerage program but also building a broader bipartisan understanding. By bipartisan support, member for South Perth, I mean more than just from the Liberal Party; I include the National Party and the Independents in this matter. We need a broader understanding of the multifaceted responses that

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we must make to waste water management generally. The infill sewerage program is one element of that. We need to be more clever and to broaden our horizons on the possibilities. This motion will not bring us to that position.

MR R.N. SWEETMAN (Ningaloo) [4.46 pm]: I will make a short contribution to this motion moved by the member for Warren-Blackwood. It is totally appropriate to form a select committee to examine the issues relating to the curtailment of the infill sewerage program. Probably one of the first places to visit to examine that issue would be Carnarvon. Carnarvon has been trying to put a sewerage system into the oldest section of Carnarvon known as South Ward for the best part of 30 years. I recall some of the bitter battles that took place between the residents of that area and the shire of the day when the shire used to run the sewerage scheme in Carnarvon. There is to this day a monument in South Ward to the warring and hostilities that took place all those years ago. The shire started the program with the money that it had and it then needed to borrow more money. The ratepayers in that ward petitioned the council to conduct a loan poll. Members, you have guessed it! Permission for the council to borrow more money to complete the infill sewerage program was defeated at that loan poll. Nothing has occurred, therefore, in relation to deep sewerage in South Ward for the best part of 25 to 30 years.

South Ward in Carnarvon is a unique area. It has approximately 900 to 1 000 houses, 60 to 70 per cent of which are in very low-lying areas where the water table is only 0.8 of a metre below the surface. It is, therefore, traditionally a difficult area in the first instance in which to put a sewerage system. However, the existing septic systems there are failing on far too regular a basis, simply because of waterlogging and the inability of sewerage systems to work properly. In addition, with the high water table, the area is subject to tides. That means that the leachates emanating from effluent systems are quickly and easily finding their way into existing estuaries and water systems in that area. The Department of Health has not taken as close an interest in that problem over the years as it should have. I am sure the priorities for infill sewerage in South Ward would have been brought forward had the Department of Health taken a more active interest in them. It is an issue whereby what the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over. Nevertheless, the need for a sewerage scheme in the South Ward of Carnarvon is desperate. We were supposed to provide it in our last year of Government. However, problems arose over the siting of the effluent ponds that were to be situated in the south east of Carnarvon. Under our Government, the project was postponed for a year and it was supposed to proceed in 2001, but it was again postponed until 2002. Information on this project is scant. It is hard to tease information out of the Water Corporation. I am not criticising anyone within the Water Corporation, but it is reluctant to commit to the infill sewerage program. Two months ago when the manager of the area, Hugh Lavery, who is based in Geraldton, briefed me on the Coral Bay sewerage program, I asked for an update on the Carnarvon sewerage program. He said that some preconstruction work would be done this financial year and, if all went well, tenders would be called for in October or November of the next financial year. That is 2003. Already there is a significant delay. There are business opportunities waiting to happen at south Carnarvon if the infill sewerage program is implemented. Some development can take place and units can be built on some of the land in the event that the sewerage system goes ahead. People have put development plans on hold because they do not know whether the sewerage system will be built. The delays have curtailed a lot of development. Regional Western Australia needs that like it needs a hole in the head.

There is a dire need to reprioritise many of the areas that initially were on the infill sewerage program. Reprioritisation must occur in the event that towns are dropped off the list altogether. I understand that the Government must operate within its budget. I understand that, as the years go by, the \$800 million that the last Government allocated to the program might not go as far as it would have previously. Therefore, under this program, many towns that were to be provided with deep sewerage systems might not get them. We must look throughout the length and breadth of Western Australia to ascertain to which towns the Government will allocate funds to build infill sewerage systems.

Coral Bay was an area of priority when we were in government. I recall being heavily involved in the negotiations that took place between the local people at Coral Bay, the Shire of Carnarvon, the development commission, the minister, the Water Corporation and others. Government members visited Coral Bay on an all too regular basis. Some serious problems are involved in building a sewerage system in Coral Bay. It was estimated that it would cost \$500 million to build a deep sewerage system in Coral Bay to cover the entire area. People such as I have lingering concerns about the current size of Coral Bay and the potential for it to expand when a deep sewerage system is provided and full normalisation takes place. All the land that is currently under the district plan will be able to be converted to freehold land and development will be able to take place. Many issues are at play.

I recall sitting down with the then minister and people from the Water Corporation three or four years ago. I said that there would be real problems if we committed to a full effluent disposal scheme for Coral Bay, because the

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town would grow like Topsy. Probably, instead of having a residual population of 1 500 - or 1 500 places as they are called - it would be more like 3 500 or 4 000 places, which is too many for Coral Bay, and that is leaving aside the argument about Mauds Landing.

The other problem in the construction of a sewerage scheme for Coral Bay was the cost of installing the infrastructure. Basically there are three ratepayers in Coral Bay. Even when normalisation takes place, it will have a very limited rate base. Under cost recovery, it is not hard to work out that those people will be rated on the maximum percentage in the dollar under the gross rental value system. That has already created complications in Shark Bay and Onslow, which is why the minister and the Water Corporation had to intervene and put a cap on residential rates. It was particularly difficult in Coral Bay. We never convinced Mr Brogan, Mr Monk or the owners of the hotel that a package treatment plant or some other model treatment plant with an ultimate cost of \$1.8 million or \$2.4 million was an alternative option. I believe such a plant would be totally adequate and would suit their needs. It would service the existing requirements of Coral Bay without automatically adding pressure for further expansion and development. Had we chosen a lesser option for deep sewerage in Coral Bay, several ends would have been achieved. That is why all the work that was done by the previous administration went out the window when the new Government came to power. Some organisations and individuals were able to take advantage of the new Government. Members of the new Government would not have been aware of all the work that had been done. The Government's \$7.5 million scheme for Coral Bay has jumped the gun, because it is too extravagant for the population base it will service if we keep the population of Coral Bay at the level it is at today. Arguments will take place over Mauds Landing and Coral Bay. We must bear in mind what might happen, because the Government is consenting to Coral Bay growing bigger than Mauds Landing.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Was it not the case that when the Premier announced the funding that neither Coral Bay nor the shires knew anything about it? The proposed site is on the land owned by the Coral Coast Marina Development Pty Ltd. It is absurd.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: That is right. The Government will have to talk turkey with Coral Coast Marina Development Pty Ltd to get approval to put the effluent disposal ponds in the preferred location. There will be advantages later if CCMD can get approval for its project because it will be able to integrate the two effluent disposal systems. However, currently the Water Corporation has told me that none of that has been factored into its designs or costings to supply the sewerage scheme for Coral Bay.

The situation at Coral Bay is interesting because, when the announcement was made, we all thought that the Government was providing \$7.5 million to develop a sewerage system there. The Premier's press release on 6 June 2002 states -

Premier Geoff Gallop has announced a \$7.5million plan to address a potential pollution threat to the Ningaloo Marine Park at Coral Bay.

Dr Gallop said that Cabinet at its regional meeting in Carnarvon yesterday had approved the expenditure of \$7.5million to provide a wastewater system for the town.

I do not know why the Premier did not say then what the situation was. Geoff White from the Water Corporation briefed the Carnarvon Shire Council about three weeks ago. He said that the Government would not contribute any money to the project, which is interesting. The Government told the Water Corporation that it had approval to borrow \$7.5 million to put in a sewerage system at Coral Bay. Denise Brailey would interpret this as tricky language.

Mr C.J. Barnett: The Government has left out the little detail, in the same way as it did not tell the public about the 200 gaming machines at Burswood Casino.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: It is like the \$100 million to deepen the port of Geraldton; the Government gave the port authority permission to borrow \$100 million to do the job itself. I understand and accept that the Government underwrites those borrowings, which are a part of the State's bottom line debt. That is all taken into account when our credit rating is assessed. It is tricky to say that Cabinet approved the expenditure of \$7.5 million when the Government was going to tell a government trading enterprise to borrow \$7.5 million to do the work.

Mr E.S. Ripper: You should look at the press statements and announcements of the previous Government.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: There was a great picture opportunity for the Premier when he made the announcement at Coral Bay. The Government got good press as a consequence. I suppose that this good press would not automatically have followed had the Premier said that the Government had given the Water Corporation

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approval to borrow \$7.5 million. Instead, an article on the front page of *The Northern Guardian* of the following week had the headline "Protest goes to the top" and stated -

Premier Geoff Gallop was greeted by three bikini-clad women and hundreds of residents when he arrived in Coral Bay last week to announce funding for a sewerage system.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Gee, jealousy is a curse, isn't it?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I do not know whether it is jealousy; I am simply saying that the Premier made these announcements and received all the accolades and bouquets when the responsibility for funding and servicing the debt of that program is not his. The other instruction to the Water Corporation is that there will be full cost recovery of the \$7.5 million debt through rates levied against Coral Bay ratepayers. That goes back to when Kim Hames was the minister. He took a realistic view of that project. Although he wanted to put in sewerage, he understood the capacity of the residents of that area at that time and for the foreseeable future to pay for it. He realised that huge community service obligations would be required from the Government for it to be viable, simply because the rates that needed to be levied against those ratepayers to service the debt could not be levied. I do not know whether this goes across all sectors of rating, but I understand that the maximum that can be struck is 12c in the dollar for gross rental value.

I earlier made reference to the situation that occurred in Shark Bay and Onslow. It is worth referring to that for a moment. The Water Corporation held a series of public meetings in Shark Bay before it started the infill sewerage program. It led community members to believe that their rates would be within a certain figure. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the figure given to the community, and which they do not shy away from, was an average rate for a residential property of around \$600. It cost just over \$5 million to put in the sewerage system. This project did not extend to the whole of Denham in Shark Bay but to about 40 per cent or perhaps a little more of the town. When residents got their first rate notices, the average rate was something like \$950. I recall being bailed up one day by a Denham ratepayer who asked me whether I knew what we had done to him. He told me that his rate bill was \$8 500. I thought we had a real problem with this upset ratepayer and asked what he owned, assuming that he had a commercial business in Knight Terrace or somewhere like that. He had 10 houses. Still, the average rate notice for those 10 houses was \$850. I told him that I would love to have his problem - owning 10 houses in Shark Bay. The Shark Bay Shire Council took up the fight on behalf of its ratepayers and went on strike. It refused to pay its rates. Fortunately, I got to the Ashburton Shire Council before it took such extreme action up in Onslow, because another sewerage scheme was being completed up there at a cost of \$5.5 million. The average rate for that shire's ratepayers was in excess of \$900 as well. I managed to convince them to hang on. I told them that the minister was having a look at the matter and would take an item to council. I said that the minister was negotiating a position with Dr Jimmy Gill of the Water Corporation, and that I was sure that the rate that would be struck would be a little better than the one they were getting at that time. It was hastily put together. That is where the cap originated. I do not know whether this Government is continuing with the cap. I have not heard anything from the people of Onslow or Shark Bay since Labor came to government, so I assume that the cap of \$550 on residential rates is still in place. To some extent I think that is a fairly inequitable rate. For example, I live in Carnarvon and before the cap was introduced I paid a rate in excess of \$800. All of a sudden that rate dropped to \$550 once the cap was introduced. A first homebuyer who lives in a small house just down the road from me in Carnarvon did not pay rates of \$550 in the first place. However, no adjustment was made to his rates. I probably have a greater capacity to pay the higher rate than he had to pay his more modest rate. I do not think that the scheme was worked out well. However, we did not have much time, and at least we were able to get back to Shark Bay and Onslow -

Mr R.C. Kucera: Go down the road and give him a quid if you feel that way.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I am talking about the inequity of this particular rate. I am not sure that the Government is even aware of it.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Was that cap in place throughout regional Western Australia or just in your area?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: It was in place throughout Western Australia. The press release said that there would be no residential rate for sewerage in excess of \$550. That gave Onslow some comfort. The residents of Shark Bay decided that they would all pay that rate because it was far closer to the rate that they had been told they would have to pay. Sewerage treatment works were put in place in many areas of the State and rates for those areas came in under the cap anyway. There are examples of that. However, it is costly to do things in the north. I guess Shark Bay and Onslow are not good examples, simply because of the cost of doing things in those areas. Onslow is particularly dear. I do not think that it is ever out of water. The water table is very high in Onslow, which has created problems for it.

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A select committee would do well to look at those issues. If there are some anomalies in the sewerage rates, who better to look at those anomalies than a select committee? Paragraphs (a) to (f) are well crafted and well thought out. Those matters should be in a motion such as this. I have already mentioned some of them. I will briefly refer to item (c), which relates to the impact on the contracting and plumbing industry in regional Western Australia. As a contractor in a previous life, I know how difficult it can be to tool up on the understanding that there will be work over a reasonable period. We are talking about sewerage but this could apply equally to the underground power scheme. Many contractors tool up and employ people on the basis that they will do a certain amount of work each year.

Mr P.D. Omodei: That's what they don't understand.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: The Government has no idea. I have spoken to many of those contractors, as well as those in other fields. They are absolutely bewildered by the hesitancy and reluctance of the Government to continue some of the capital works programs of the previous Government, even those that the new Government did not have any problem with. It seemed to pull all the plugs out of the contracting system. That has been an impediment to many of these contractors staying in business or employing the number of people that they need to employ in the expectation that they will win contracts in the foreseeable future. That needs to be borne in mind.

I am running out of time. I have basically referred to most things that I needed to. I encourage the minister to look at this issue. He is the minister representing the Minister for Government Enterprises, Hon Nick Griffiths. It is worth the Government's time to consider the appointment of this select committee.

MR A.D. MARSHALL (Dawesville) [5.07 pm]: I support the motion moved by the member for Warren-Blackwood, which seeks to establish a select committee of the Legislative Assembly to inquire into -

... the impact of the State Labor Government's decision to curtail the infill sewerage scheme in Western Australia, ...

The motion calls for six points to be researched. I am particularly interested in the first point, which simply states -

the impact on the environment including the pollution of rivers, lakes and estuarine environs;

All those areas are found in the electorate I represent. In fact, my electorate has the largest waterways in Western Australia. If members do not believe me, they should watch the Channel 9 weather report, and they will be able to compare the size of the Swan River and the Perth estuarine system with the system to the south - the estuarine areas and waterways of the Peel region; they are three times the size of the Swan region. That southern estuarine area embraces the Harvey and Peel Inlets, which hold a huge amount of water, the Murray and Serpentine Rivers that feed into those inlets, Lake Clifton and Lake Preston, and, of course, the Indian Ocean along the western front. If ever there were a place that should have infill sewerage, it is the Peel region, and particularly my electorate of Dawesville. This was recognised by the previous Government and was being put in place. When the member for Warren-Blackwood was the Minister for Water Resources between 1993 and 1995, he decided to put infill sewerage into Furnissdale, which is in the Murray shire. It is a huge area that had half-acre and acre blocks. However, the land could not be subdivided because early settlements were made on low-lying areas and septic tanks were put in willy-nilly. At high tide in winter, effluent would float all over the place. It was not a hygienic place in which to live. Environmentally, it was a disgrace. Our minister stepped in and said that sewerage must be put in. He opened up that area by value adding. People were able to subdivide their blocks. More rates went to the Murray shire. More people went to live there, more shops were developed and employment grew, all through an infill sewerage project.

The infill sewerage project in the Mandurah and Dawesville area was going along beautifully until this Government came to power. It cut the program back by 80 per cent. It is doing it willy-nilly. It says that this year it will allocate \$5 million to a little area, and next year it will allocate a couple of million dollars to another little area to make it look good. In fact, it looks poor. Dawesville is the largest country electorate in Western Australia. The population growth is along the urban strip from the Mandurah Estuary Bridge, or new bridge as it is known, and past Port Bouvard or the channel bridge to Lake Clifton. That is a narrow strip of pristine land bounded by the Indian Ocean and the Peel and Harvey Inlets. In the old days when people moved to Falcon and the like, they installed their septic tanks without a plan. As the population has grown, so too has the irregularity of planning for septic tanks. The local government has no idea about where they are. There is a legal requirement for the tanks to be a certain distance apart, but that cannot be adhered to because the local government does not know where they have been laid. The sooner we have infill sewerage through that pristine strip, the sooner the environment of the area will benefit. Many new houses are being built. A country electorate has a mean of 12 000 constituents. Mandurah has 13 000 constituents, and Dawesville has 19 000. It is still planned to continue the program in old Mandurah, which has many septic tanks; however, the area in

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which all the new homes are being built also needs infill sewerage. This is the time to install it. The program is being delayed because the proper amount of money has not been allocated to that area. If ever there were a place that needed infill sewerage from an environmental point of view, it would be the electorate of Dawesville. I have mentioned the waterways and their width. North Dandalup in the Murray area was considered a priority as it backs on to the Serpentine River. After this Government came to power, the program for that area was scrapped.

I ask this Government to consider a select committee. It will not do it any harm. The six points mentioned by the member for Warren-Blackwood are well thought out. I would like to be on such a committee because the issue interests me immensely. I strongly support the motion of the member for Warren-Blackwood. I hope that the House votes for this select committee for the sake of the environment of Western Australia.

MR J.N. HYDE (Perth) [5.12 pm]: I oppose this motion. It is important to note that members on both sides of the House are committed to infill sewerage. The basis of this discussion is whether the program should be completed exclusively over 10 years or over 15 years, during which time a range of other capital activities can be undertaken. It is a slight prioritising of our capital expenditure. Everybody who has spoken is in favour of infill sewerage, and it is important that we appreciate that. The effect of this motion would be to expand rather than speed up the implementation of the infill sewerage program in this State. Let us look at it in pure economic terms. We should consider the cost of setting up a select committee. It would need to be staffed, and be able to research the subject properly over a considered time. I would rather see that money go to the electorate of one of the members who has spoken today to provide infill sewerage for up to seven houses so that the program can be completed in 14 rather than 15 years. A number of people have spoken and, as we have seen, members have different priorities. For the member for Dawesville, not having infill sewerage in his electorate is the most pressing problem in the State, and the member for Ningaloo considers that not having infill sewerage in his electorate is the most pressing problem in the State. The member for Wagin spoke a couple of weeks ago, and he considers the installation of infill sewerage in his electorate to be the most important issue in the State. I could speak from a personal perspective and say that my property in Denmark, which has no infill sewerage, a septic tank, an unsealed road and bad TV reception, is a priority. Everyone has different priorities. The important thing this Government is doing is consulting with regional communities. Those members who are still in the Chamber who are close to regional communities will know that if those communities were asked what the Government's number one priority should be, not all would say infill sewerage. Roads need to be sealed and communities need the provision of good-quality water. Other environmental issues are important. The Government must address a gamut of issues. In slightly extending the completion of the scheme from 10 to 15 years, the Treasurer has provided the Government with the ability to carry out a number of other capital works. Of course, those other capital works will provide employment and income for regional businesses. The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure recently announced the decision to fast-track the construction of a number of roads in regional areas. The Government has also announced drought relief. That money has not come from just anywhere. We did not go to the Water Corporation and ask it to borrow \$6 million from Tirath Khemlani so that we can provide drought relief. The money has come from the Government. We would not have been able to provide that drought assistance if all our eggs had been in the one basket. By making an economic decision to slightly expand this scheme, the 100 000 properties that were to be covered by this program when it was announced by the second Court dynasty in 1994 -

Mr P.D. Omodei: 110 000.

Mr J.N. HYDE: My understanding is that the announcement was for 100 000 homes - 80 000 in the metropolitan area and 20 000 in regional Western Australia.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

Mr J.N. HYDE: He said 100 000 last time. I think he was right the last time. Those houses will still get infill sewerage. In the interim, we should consider a couple of the issues that have been raised. The members for Vasse and Riverton spoke about sustainability. The end result of an infill sewerage program is a more sustainable and environmentally safe community. Other activities can achieve those same aims. The grey water diversion program is one of the most amazing changes that has occurred in this State. The members for Riverton and Warren-Blackwood and I have worked closely with Stuart Henry and the Master Plumbers and Gasfitters Association of Western Australia. They have done some great work with grey water. If the number of us who own country properties could divert grey water from the septic tank system and reprocess it, we would produce beneficial environmental effects through the longer life expectancy of the septic tank, the increased period between flushings, the decreased amount of fill from rain seepage and so on. Those environmental effects would be similar to the effects that would be produced if we hurried the completion of the infill sewerage program. However, if we had chosen to do that, we would not have been able to provide increased road sealing, drought relief or other economic incentives for regional Western Australia. As some members opposite know, it is very

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hard in government. Governments must make decisions. The decision has been made to conduct the program over 15 years.

A member referred to the Biomax toilet in Kalbarri. A Biomax or a similar self-contained toilet system is being used in a couple of the national parks.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Like the night man!

Mr J.N. HYDE: I remember the night man from my youth. We are talking about being environmentally sensitive and sustainable. When I was younger somebody would come down the back lane in the night cart and collect the cans. There was no seepage or damage to the local environment. The local streets were not ripped up to lay pipes. The waste was taken straight away for treatment. It is interesting that, as an employment-creation program, that process has not been reinstated.

The Parliament has established select committees. It is appropriate that in a bipartisan and independent way, select committees choose the issues that they want to investigate. That is done not only free from government interference but also free from interference from Parliament. I do not think that this Parliament has yet to direct every committee to undertake investigations. The onus has been on individual committees to pursue issues that are of importance to the State as a whole and to their collective electorates. That is quite a healthy system for engendering perhaps not merely power sharing but also better outcomes for the good governance of the State. In those circumstances, I do not think that we would have a motion on a standing committee in these terms. If I wanted to move an amendment, which I do not, I would be looking at reaffirming the commitment of the Parliament to the importance of infill sewerage. The issue of a five-year extension of the program, when taken together with the other added benefits we are seeing, must be weighed up as part of the total issue. We must look at it in the light of real sustainability.

Health issues, environmental issues and employment issues have been touched on. We cannot talk in isolation about people who may have been able very quickly to piggyback infill sewerage jobs. They may be dealing with some of the piping and road-making requirements involving similar machinery and expertise in regional areas that are being required by our speeding up of the construction of roads through the Department for Planning and Infrastructure. One must therefore look at the State in totality when talking about the impacts of the extension of the program. All these points would come out if we were to agree to this motion, set up a committee and spend so much money on the administration and bureaucracy of a committee. I would hazard to say that the eventual recommendation would be, even on economic rationalist grounds, that the benefits of the extension of the program to 15 years would more than match the economic rationalist, social and cultural benefits to the community of Western Australia of the program being carried out over 10 years. One of the good reasons that this motion was brought on by the Opposition may be so that we could have the discussion. I hope that my colleagues in this House will support me in my intention to oppose the motion.

MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Innaloo) [5.23 pm]: I also oppose the motion. I wish to declare my interest in doing so. I live in one of those residences where sewage still has to be processed in septic tanks. I live on the coast at Trigg in a house built in the 1960s. All my neighbours are in a like position. We watched with interest and hope as the sewerage contractors worked in Arnott Street and Bailey Street towards the crest of the hill. There were only two streets to go down before they reached the coast. We were thinking that our houses would soon be connected to the sewerage system. Having phoned the Water Corporation and made further inquiries at the time the decision was announced, I found that it would be at least another five years before my house was connected to the sewerage system.

I am not speaking against this motion while sitting comfortably on deep sewage - I am glad that someone picked up the wit - but rather sitting in an electorate where a good deal of infill has taken place to the east of the coastal area. This has been especially helpful because it has been near wetlands in my electorate. The infill sewerage program in other areas that do not drain into the wetlands has been delayed to effect other social good that had been long neglected in our community. It is all a question of balance and the way in which the Government spends its money. The Osborne Park Hospital is the best B-grade hospital in the State. I say "B-grade" not because it gives B-grade care but because it does not have an accident and emergency department. In every other respect it is a top-rate hospital. As a result of a series of decisions made by the previous Government, the hospital had been allowed to wither on the vine; in fact, a plan had been made for a land swap between Homeswest and the then Government so that Homeswest would give up a little portion of land at Malaga for a day surgery centre and it would acquire the beautiful campus of the Osborne Park Hospital to be subdivided. This would happen in much the same way as the previous Government closed down Scarborough Senior High School. The plan was to subdivide the campus of Osborne Park Hospital and put the resulting money into consolidated revenue. The Deputy Premier and Treasurer of this State in the last budget approved \$13.5 million to be spent on the upgrading of Osborne Park Hospital, thus securing this important asset for the community.

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One can see from this one example that by extending the completion time for the infill program by a mere 60 months, funds became available for capital works that were so important to the community.

Did this delay or deferral cause ecological problems in Innaloo? Not a bit of it. My electorate has suffered from very serious water and ecological problems. The area suffered from very poor ground water quality. It had nothing to do with the deferral of the completion date of the suburban sewerage infill program. The largest two subdivisions in my electorate contain in the order of over 1 000 blocks. A decision had been made under the previous Government to allow the subdivision to proceed without there being any protocols, guidelines or requirements to deal with the known problem caused by the extraction of peat from swamplands. Once the peat had been extracted by developers and stockpiled in the expectation that one day they might be able to sell it to gardeners, the peat reacted with the oxygen in the atmosphere. This caused acid that leached through the peat pile and into the soil. The acid dissolved the heavy metals in the soil, which completely polluted the ground water supply in the Balcatta-Osborne Park area. It poisoned people's gardens and all sorts of things. This environmental problem should have been dealt with when the subdivision application was going through the planning stages. This was the biggest ground water pollution problem in my electorate. It had nothing to do with suburban sewerage infill. It only needed the care of the previous Government to require the developers, when the minister signed off the approvals for the subdivision, to take the peat offsite and not to stand it above a shallow ground water table, as is required in every other State in Australia.

The motion refers to the impact on the environment, including the pollution of rivers, lakes and estuarine environs. Many factors in Western Australia adversely affect the environment. It is total oversimplification to say that extending the program by some 60 months will bring doom, gloom and destruction on the environment of Western Australia. When there is a reordering of government capital works, or indeed the completion of government capital works, contractors will have to reorder their business. It happens at the completion or the extension of every contract. That in itself is not a reason, as advanced by the Opposition, to say that Western Australia should put aside these other important social works. I have cited as an example the rebuilding of the Osborne Park Hospital and the securing of that health facility for decades to come for the people of Western Australia. One need only look at the state of capital works in the health sector prior to the election of the Labor Government. Something had to be done. Can we spend all this money on the sewerage system, or do we keep spending a little less on sewerage over a longer time and give people decent operating theatres, after-care and community health workers? These are always questions of priority for government. I applaud the Government on the decision it has made to extend this important infill program by 60 months, which will give the Government that much more room to deal with urgent capital works that need to be undertaken now for the good of Western Australia. Therefore, I will vote against this motion and I urge my colleagues in this Chamber to do likewise.

MR P.D. OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood) [5.31 pm]: I thank members for their contributions to this debate. However, I am absolutely dismayed with the response of the Government. Nearly every member missed the point of the motion. The motion was about the impact of the infill sewerage program in Western Australia and all the other ancillary benefits, including septic, nitrate and phosphate run-off into the environment. The main point was that it is seriously impacting on small businesses in rural Western Australia, where the program has been curtailed. Because the infill sewerage program has not been completed in a host of small towns, those small businesses are about to go broke.

I am sure that the members who spoke today did not listen to the speech I made a couple of weeks ago when I first moved the motion. I very carefully outlined the impact on small business. I will provide members with yet another example. The Treasurer misunderstood the situation. He thought that businesses in Bridgetown could be bought for a cheaper price than those in Perth. The example I gave was that a business in downtown Bridgetown pays \$2 200 a year for sewerage rates, while a similar business with the same gross rental value in the city pays \$280 a year. That is the reason chambers of commerce have approached me. A host of other examples indicates very clearly that if this program goes on for an extra five years, many of these people will be either bankrupt or very close to it. That is the fundamental argument of this motion.

Members suggested that we will no longer have parliamentary select committees. I remind members of the House that, under the previous Government, an inquiry was conducted by the Select Committee on Metropolitan Development and Groundwater Supplies, which was chaired by Hon Mike Board. The committee comprehensively studied the supply of ground water and the impacts on ground water. As a result of that parliamentary select committee, the Government of Western Australia protected a whole lot of ground water in the Gnangara mound, the Jandakot mound and down towards Baldivis. We prioritised the ground water that was being impacted on by pollution plumes, which the member for Innaloo spoke about. His speech did not relate to the subject at all. It related to all the things that impact on our precious ground water. We know how important that is because a number of studies have been conducted into the issue.

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Mr M.F. Board: One of the major parts of that report indicates that if you are going to protect the ground water, you have to protect it from sewage and the lateral movement of sewage through septic tanks.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I do not need to remind the House about the number of toxic waste dumps in the metropolitan area; there are dozens of them. The previous Government spent a lot of money cleaning up some of those toxic waste dumps, and so will this Government and future Governments. Pollution plumes are seriously impacting on our water supplies and the quality of life of people in this State. We cannot ignore that. I detect by the demeanour and comments of government members that they will not agree to this motion. They should not suggest that there will no longer be parliamentary select committees, because I have just provided the example of the select committee chaired by Hon Mike Board, which was a great success and dealt with a matter on a comprehensive basis. That cannot be compared with the inquiry into the Bellevue fire, which was dealt with by a standing committee. That was a one-off issue in one locality. We are talking about a statewide project that impacts on people the length and breadth of Western Australia. It impacts on their way of life, their health, the economy, the environment and so on. I have absolutely no confidence in the member for Riverton's ability to properly deal with this issue. His comments further confirm to me that he is not competent in this area.

The Treasurer has suggested that there are community service obligations to the value of about \$238 million, including \$163.5 million for water and sewerage, \$20.1 million for irrigation and \$10.6 million for drainage. What is he suggesting we should do? Shall we stop the cross-subsidy for drainage? What shall we do with the drainage systems in Armadale, Byford and Busselton? In the 1930s before those drains were constructed, in a wet winter the water used to bank up knee-deep to the Yoongarillup hall, which is about eight kilometres from Busselton. Of course we must have those drainage systems for the benefit of the State in general. It is impossible for country people to pay the full cost for sewerage. There is a community service obligation. I gave members the Bridgetown example. It costs the Water Corporation \$240 000 to run the infill sewerage plant and its income is \$140 000, so there is a community service obligation of about \$100 000. However, I am saying that the community service obligation needs to be expanded to assist those businesses. If not, there will be a negative impact on the community across Western Australia. I do not know whose idea it was to extend the program. I suggest to the Treasurer with the greatest of respect that because it was such a successful, conservative government program, the Labor Party had to change it. That is what it was all about. It was not about saving money for other projects, because it was funded from the borrowings of the Water Corporation. The Water Corporation does not build hospitals; the State of Western Australia builds hospitals.

Mr A.D. McRae interjected.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: The member for Riverton is a rabbit! He just talks and talks and he does not know what he is talking about. This is an important issue. I do not raise trivial matters in this Parliament. I have raised this issue because I passionately believe that it is impacting on the businesses of the people who came to see me. The matter needs to be addressed; it is only fair and just that we look into it. It is just another example of the disdain this Government has for those issues affecting areas outside the metropolitan area; who gives a damn about it! What annoys me is the attitude of members opposite because it is the Opposition's motion.

I can recall when a parliamentary select committee inquiry was conducted into the right to farm. During the term of the previous Labor Government the member for Stirling, as the shadow spokesman for agriculture, chaired that committee. The Government was magnanimous enough to allow an opposition member to chair a parliamentary select committee that travelled to the United States and Canada to investigate the right to farm. I am not suggesting that the proposed parliamentary committee should travel anywhere out of Western Australia. I want the proposed committee to take evidence and call on people and papers to ensure this issue is dealt with. My greatest wish is that out of that parliamentary select committee process, a recommendation would be made to the Government to extend the community service obligation to alleviate the impact on small businesses and families in rural and regional Western Australia. Many areas in metropolitan electorates do not have infill sewerage. However, the neighbours who are on infill sewerage are not punished, because the metropolitan areas have a sufficient number of homes connected to sewerage; therefore, the rating of the dollar on the gross rental value is very low. In rural Western Australia the sewerage system is connected to only a few homes; therefore, the home owners pay the maximum rate of the GRV, which is 12c in the dollar. That is why a business in Bridgetown pays rates of \$2 200 when a business of the same size in Perth pays \$280. Do members opposite, especially the Treasurer, get my point? For God's sake, it is a very important issue. I am asking that this Parliament seriously consider this issue.

If the Government cannot agree to it now, I will take my argument somewhere else until I am heard. If the Government does not respond during the election campaign, many people in the city will be concerned about the curtailment of this program. I am asking for a simple CSO in downtown Bridgetown, which might cost \$50 000, \$100 000 or even \$250 000. In the overall scheme of things it would cost a pittance, because in the end the Government would get back the money. If businesses are connected to infill sewerage and the hotel in Nannup

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can build more units and earn more income, the money will come back to the State through stamp duty and payroll tax.

The Government is adopting a short-sighted view of this issue. I apologise for getting a bit carried away. I did not want to get too excited about the matter. However, I know that what I am saying is right. I can understand that some members might want to waste private members' time - it is a fairly common tactic - but if members speak in Parliament, they must at least know what they are talking about. We are dealing with the lives of people and their children, and small business, in rural and regional Western Australia. That is where the lack of action on this program is having the most impact. Regions such as Bunbury and Mandurah will not be impacted on to the same extent because they will benefit from the volume of homes connected to the sewerage system, which means that the rate will be lower. The businesses in the smaller towns in the 112 regional councils are hurting. They have come to me and I have argued to the best of my ability to convince the Government to establish a parliamentary select committee. The cost of such a select committee in Western Australia would be a pittance. I implore members opposite to think very carefully about this motion and to agree with it, because it is a very worthwhile motion.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (18)

Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr J.P.D. Edwards	Mr B.K. Masters	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr M.F. Board	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr P.D. Omodei	Ms S.E. Walker
Dr E. Constable	Ms K. Hodson-Thomas	Mr P.G. Pendal	Mr J.L. Bradshaw (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr M.G. House	Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan	
Mrs C.L. Edwardes	Mr W.J. McNee	Mr R.N. Sweetman	

Noes (25)

Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr S.R. Hill	Ms S.M. McHale	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr C.M. Brown	Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr A.D. McRae	Mr P.B. Watson
Mr A.J. Carpenter	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr N.R. Marlborough	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr A.J. Dean	Mr R.C. Kucera	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms M.M. Quirk (<i>Teller</i>)
Dr J.M. Edwards	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr A.P. O'Gorman	
Dr G.I. Gallop	Mr J.A. McGinty	Mr J.R. Quigley	
Mrs D.J. Guise	Mr M. McGowan	Mr E.S. Ripper	

Pairs

Mr A.D. Marshall	Ms A.J. MacTiernan
Mr M.J. Birney	Mr J.B. D'Orazio
Mr R.F. Johnson	Mrs C.A. Martin
Mr M.W. Trenorden	Mrs M.H. Roberts

Question thus negatived.