

## MONCK HEAD BOAT RAMP PROPOSAL

### *Motion*

**MR R.N. SWEETMAN** (Ningaloo) [5.20 pm]: I move -

That this House calls on the Government to halt plans to construct a boat ramp with ancillary services at Monck Head on the Ningaloo Reef. The current proposal appears to be inappropriate because of its size and the environmental impact it will have on the reef.

This House further calls on the Government to subject the current proposal to independent assessment and to report on -

- (a) environmental impact;
- (b) navigational and safety issues; and
- (c) whether the public environmental review for the previous smaller proposal is adequate in the revised circumstances.

And separately, substantiate or otherwise the reasons that north Bills Bay is not the preferred location for the Coral Bay boat ramp.

At the outset, I will take a commonsense and practical approach to the debate about the site of the Coral Bay boat ramp. This saga has been going on for the past six or seven years, probably longer. There has always been a proposal to do something by way of a permanent boat ramp to service the boating community that frequents Coral Bay and the areas on either side, where there is a lot of camping, particularly during peak periods, which are normally school holidays.

Originally four sites for a boat ramp were under consideration. These were the Monck Head site, the north Monck Head site, north Bills Bay and Bateman Bay at Point Maud. The Point Maud site was quickly eliminated from discussions because it was substantially under the control of Coral Coast Marina Development Pty Ltd, which was the proponent of the Mauds Landing concept. There were reasons that the government agency handling the proposal under both this and the previous Government looked beyond the Point Maud site, even though at the time it made sense to talk to the proponent to determine whether a better private/public arrangement could be facilitated to build a boat ramp. As members are aware, the Coral Coast Marina Development group proposed to build a public boat ramp that would have been considerably more expensive and extravagant than even what is being proposed today, even though this current project has grown like Topsy and escalated in cost. Arguably, if the Mauds Landing project had gone ahead, the public would never have become involved in this matter.

The four preferred sites were quickly eliminated to three and then to two preferred sites; that is, the site at Monck Head, which is south of Coral Bay, and the north Bills Bay option, which is north of Coral Bay. The assessment was quite interesting. The minister would be aware that previously I was generally in favour of the Monck Head site over the north Bills Bay site because the proposal, as I originally saw it, was considerably smaller. In our haste to come up with a more manageable scenario and to remove fishing and charter boats and other vessels from the Bills Bay area adjacent to Coral Bay, we assumed that the dominant use for a boat ramp mooring and service facility would be to service the professional industry, such as fishermen and charter operators. However, from the way in which the use of the Monck Head boat ramp has grown, it is clear that it has grown to service more recreational craft. I believe that originally the assessment was for approximately 100 recreational boats a day. That has now been reassessed to 150 to 200 recreational boats a day. People are now generally saying that we are looking at upwards of 200 recreational boats a day at peak periods of the year using the three boat ramps that make up the new Monck Head -

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Which people are saying that?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: That is the anecdotal evidence, whether it is from Coral Bay people or others. The tourism operators in that area say that we are looking at upwards of 150, and probably within a short period upwards of 200, because of the way in which the numbers have escalated since people started to make estimates five, six or seven years ago of the number of recreational boaties who will use a boat ramp. Because of the way in which tourism numbers in that area have grown, in excess of 150 boats a day is a reasonable assumption.

At this stage I refer to the "Ningaloo coast regional strategy Carnarvon to Exmouth". That is a planning statement as well as many other things, of course. It sets up the statutory body to manage the marine park area; that is, the coastal area from south of Carnarvon around to north of Giralia station in the Exmouth Gulf. Again, I do not want to overstate the environmental argument, because I want this to be a practical, commonsense argument in which we put on the table both options: north Bills Bay and Monck Head. I simply believe that in

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the environmental assessment, whether it is by the Environmental Protection Authority, the Department of Environmental Protection or through the public environmental process or what have you, we can get a bit hysterical in the way in which we assess the environment. We always seem to assume that whatever man does will have a detrimental effect on the environment. However, the reality is something else. It is not all losses for the environment.

I have no hesitation in saying that whether it is the north Bills Bay boat ramp or the Monck Head boat ramp, it will become an ecosystem in its own right. Whenever people walk out onto a rock groyne or breakwater, they see the proliferation of weeds, sponges, micro-organisms, algae, small fish, the larger fish that prey on the small fish, the crustaceans and everything else. Certainly, I believe there are wins in this for the environment. Normally those wins are manifest long after the project is built and the hysteria over the assessment has died down, and demonstrate to us that not everything that man does is necessarily a fundamental and contagious evil for the environment. I guess the pier on the tip of North West Cape is an example of that. It is rated as one of the top 10 dive sites in the world. That is because man made the pier there, following which all the organisms, the corals and everything else grew. The biodiversity in that area is commented on by international divers, who rate it, as I said, in the top 10 dive sites in the world. That is a further demonstration that not everything has a detrimental impact on the environment. I will try to steer through that, if I can. Nonetheless, there are some environmental issues regarding the Monck Head boat ramp that I believe tip the scales in favour of the north Bills Bay proposal.

It is quite clear from the assessment of both sites, whether it be the private submissions that were made or the response from government agencies, that the difference between the two sites is narrow. I do not know what tipped the balance in favour of the Monck Head site in the end. A number of government agencies made submissions. Listed in the public environmental review for the two proposals are summaries of responses from government agencies. Responses were received from the Department of Conservation and Land Management, the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority of WA, the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Fisheries, the National Native Title Tribunal, the Australian Heritage Commission, the Western Australian Tourism Commission, the Office of Water Regulation, the Gascoyne Development Commission and the Ministry for Planning.

If members can dismiss from their deliberations the fact that north Bills Bay is within the Maud sanctuary zone, north Bills Bay certainly comes out on top in an assessment. However, everyone seems to qualify any support for north Bills Bay by saying that it is in the sanctuary zone. I know that the Monck Head site had a smaller boat ramp and service area, and that less of the Monck Head boat ramp encroached into the Maud sanctuary zone. However, with the increase in scale of the Monck Head boat ramp, it has seriously encroached into the Maud sanctuary zone. By that time, there was clearly a preference within the Department for Planning and Infrastructure for the Monck Head site. What was its response? Straightaway the argument that applied to north Bills Bay being within the Maud sanctuary zone should have applied to the Monck Head option. It did not. The department's response was that it would just re-scribe the sanctuary zone. All of a sudden there was an increase in the recreational zone, taking it just beyond the breakwater of the Monck Head boat ramp. It is extraordinary that the Maud sanctuary zone was quickly dismissed as an issue when it came to the siting of and approval for the Monck Head boat ramp.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Are you acknowledging that in the original formulation it did not come into it?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: No. I still think it partially went into it. It would have had to go into it. Is the minister referring to Monck Head?

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Yes.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: The Maud sanctuary zone is being shifted between 100 and 150 metres so that it falls outside the breakwater. That is of little consequence to my mind because, 99 per cent of the time, the people who use the boat ramp - the professionals and the recreational boaties - will be accessing the ocean and fishing spots through the Maud sanctuary zone. It is a moot point to my mind. If north Bills Bay were the preferred option, people could more easily access open water and fishing areas outside the Maud sanctuary zone than would otherwise be possible. A lot has been said about the navigational and safety issues that relate to launching a boat at Monck Head. If someone is to access the open water through Yalobia or South Passage, there are some serious bommies to navigate. They show up on a couple of the plans and are marked with marker buoys. I am curious to know whether this might be another Thomson Bay. Clearly, these will be major obstacles for the fishing fleet and the recreational boaties to navigate around. Sure, the markers will be there. I do not know what sort of markers they will be. They will probably be anchored to moorings and will hopefully stay there and not disappear from time to time. With Thomson Bay, on one day boats could not fit into the bay and on the next day they could. We know what happened there. I am suspicious that something might happen to some of the coral

bommies or formations that could be a problem to boats that are navigating into the boating facility at Monck Head.

The alternative, which I did not discover before and do not know whether it is a recent decision by the department in response to navigational and safety issues, is that boats leave the ramp at Monck Head and go out into open water to fishing spots beyond the Mauds sanctuary zone. There is now a proposed boating track that will take boats from the Monck Head boat ramp into Bateman Bay, which is north of the north Bills Bay boat ramp. That is extraordinary. Our motivation initially for siting a boat ramp in either location was to take boats away from the coral; certainly out of Bills Bay adjacent to the Coral Bay settlement. However, there is a narrow navigation channel between the beach line and the start of the coral garden, and I understand it is a bit narrower than is desired and is a further imperative to get something formal in place for recreational and professional boaties because the channel they have been using is too narrow. Fortunately there have been no serious mishaps in that area, although there is a mix of recreational divers and snorkellers and professional and recreational fishing boats. The new boat ramp was intended to ensure that no boats, other than boats for coral viewing, went anywhere near the coral garden. I find it extraordinary that instead of the boats going between the foreshore and the coral garden, they will now go between the fringing reef and the western side of the coral garden. There will therefore continue to be navigation channels, probably with markers every 100 metres, or whatever is required to mark these channels, to provide boats with an alternative route. I guess this is a safety issue in itself. We therefore take some credence that South Passage is not the safest navigational option to access the ocean and the ramp, particularly on a rough day. People are accessing north Bills Bay or Bateman Bay by going between the coral garden and the fringing reef.

I do not want to put any officer from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure on the spot, but there is interesting anecdotal evidence that DPI officers have serious concerns about South Passage, because recreational fishermen have been warned that in the DPI's opinion it is not the safest access to the sea. Boaties are encouraged to find their way to their fishing spots through other areas in the reef, primarily Bateman Bay, as there are safety issues associated with negotiating South Passage.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: What is your point? Are you saying that there needs to be a water passage from Monck Head?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I have a map with me that indicates a proposed boating track that I have never seen before. I guess the minister, like me, thought that our motivation was to take boats away from the coral.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Can you tell us the date of that map so that we can get a copy?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: August 2002; therefore, it has been in existence for some time.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Is it a DPI one?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: It is a summary of the public environmental review of the two proposals for the development of a single boating facility at either Monck Head or north Bills Bay near Coral Bay. It is from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and is therefore the minister's document that was produced as part of that review process.

I believe the minister's departmental people have erred on the side of caution. They have accepted that there are navigational and safety risks in going through Yalobia in that people might come to grief on one of the bommies; or on a rough day, when there is white water from one section of the fringing reef to the other, it is commonsense to avoid that area. Obviously the DPI people have mapped out an alternative course for people to get to an area to fish, view coral or whatever. That course is noted on the map as a recommended boating track. However, it sends people from Monck Head back to Bateman Bay, which is a run of about three or four kilometres, and brings them to within 500 metres of the north Bills Bay boat ramp option. Why would people start their journey one and a half kilometres south of Coral Bay to end up two and a half kilometres the other side of Coral Bay?

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: I think I see the course that the member is talking about. Is it marked "Figure 1" in the corner?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I do not see a "Figure 1" in here minister, but that does not mean that it is not the one. It just starts off as introduction at the top of the document.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Yes, we are right; we know what you are talking about.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: Just in time for me to go off that issue. I want to go back to the responses of government agencies. I concede on one point; that is, Point Maud is obviously a significant roosting or nesting area for migrating and resident bird populations. We do not need to be totally put off or swayed in our deliberations over the north Bills Bay option with regard to these bird colonies, although there are other people better qualified and educated to advise the minister on those issues. If it is any consolation at all, these bird

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colonies quickly develop in areas in which the birds think it is safe to roost and nest. I know the minister has a lot of things planned during her visit to Carnarvon on the weekend; I appreciate that and so does the Carnarvon community. However, if she has a little time in her hectic schedule, perhaps she can look outside the small boat harbour where an island has been created on the mudflats as part of the dredging and maintenance work on the entrance to the small boat harbour. That island is totally detached from the mainland, and has become a bird colony that I think is of real significance and worthy of immediate protection, by perhaps creating a conservation area around it. It is quite extraordinary because the birds have created that colony out of nothing. The minister will find any number of migrating birds, resident gulls and terns using that island. I am not conceding in the first instance that we will displace any of the bird colonies on Point Maud, and I accept that Point Maud is a significant bird colony; however, we could site the access track to cause least inconvenience to those birds. The proposed access track will also take the longest possible route. I think it is noted somewhere in the documentation that the road from Coral Bay to the north Bills Bay boat ramp will be six kilometres long, whereas the Monck Head boat ramp road is only about 1.5 kilometres.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: But you're supporting north Bills Bay.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: Yes, I am now supporting north Bills Bay. I do think that we can cut some -

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: This is Saul on the road to Damascus.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I was frightened by the size of the Monck Head option. The minister needs to revisit the proposal on that basis; it is worth doing. It is a huge -

Mr N.R. Marlborough: It's a process in motion.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: The other day we were told that the Monck Head proposal is going ahead.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: Yes, that's right -

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I have been told that the member for Peel relayed to the local people in no uncertain terms - there was no ambiguity about his position - that the proposal will be taken to Monck Head and the people will like it.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: There are two federal reports on those environmental areas, and you haven't touched on them.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: There may well be but when we look at -

Mr N.R. Marlborough: There are five environmental reports, two of which were driven by the federal Government - John Howard's Government.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.J. Dean): Order, member!

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: If the member is selective in using the information from each of those environmental assessments, he can take whichever side he likes because he can stack his deck. He can take from each of those reports the pieces that he thinks best match his argument. The argument that the north Bills Bay boat ramp is of more significance is a nonsense. Members who have read the environmental assessments I have read on the soft corals, hard corals and other marine diversity at north Bills Bay, will know that it is not that significant. Clearly, the footprint of north Bills Bay is, at the very least, of no more consequence than the Monck Head siting.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: Rubbish. I do not know what documents you are reading.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: If the Monck Head site was covered by the Maud sanctuary zone, and the boundary of that zone is being relocated to the west to accommodate the boat ramp so that no part of it falls within the sanctuary zone, why, for goodness sake, can that not be done with the north Bills Bay site?

Mr N.R. Marlborough: All that is happening with that sanctuary zone line is a movement of 10 metres, of which the original boat ramp -

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: Ten metres?

Mr N.R. Marlborough: Yes, that is all.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: Does the member want a bet?

Mr N.R. Marlborough: Yes. That is all that will happen - a straightening up of the line. The original boat ramp that you wanted to support - it has varied since - will be within that.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I am subjecting what the member for Peel is saying to independent assessment. I am sure that the member for Carine would agree that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. I would say the distance must be closer to between 50 and 100 metres, if I can read the scale at the bottom, and the

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member for Peel was talking about 10 metres. It is 10 metres at one point either end, and that is the only place it would be 10 metres - where the boundary diminishes in a straight line back to the recreational line.

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas: It is close to 100 metres.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I have subjected the matter to independent assessment, and the member for Carine endorses what I have said, that the relocation of the Maud boundary is closer to 100 metres. I am sure that has beaten the member for Peel into submission, and he will now support what we are endeavouring to do.

Some of the issues raised against the north Bills Bay option are quite absurd. Serious questions must be asked about a heading in the document referring to environmental costs associated with the boating facility at north Bills Bay, when it includes the following dot point. I will not cite all the points, but I will cite one that I think gives a clear indication about some of the frivolous environmental aspects included as reasons against the north Bills Bay option. The third dot point reads -

Potential for a more rapid increase in boat traffic in the area and pedestrian traffic at Point Maud and Skeleton Beach. Along with the increased boating traffic, there is likely to be an increase in fishing pressure, -

That is valid for both sites, for goodness sake. The dot point continues -

boating noise, and potential for boating strikes on larger marine fauna.

There are occasional dugongs, dolphins, rays, sharks and turtles in that area. The likelihood of striking those fish and mammals is so unbelievably low as to be insignificant in an environmental assessment and should never have been included in the document. However, when the Government is scratching for reasons to eliminate a site, any excuse will do. It seems to me that the environmental reports are full of those niggling, insignificant issues that were clearly aimed at favouring one site over another.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: Can you just explain, because this is something I want to understand, what you think the motive was? We went into this process with an absolutely open mind, and in fact we might even have had a slight preference for the north Bills Bay site. What is the motive for inventing environmental reasons? There is no percentage in it for anyone to do that, and you seem to be making a case that these things were invented.

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: Some people believe that there are environmental reasons that saw Monck Head favoured over north Bills Bay. Initially, I thought the north Bills Bay option would be much more expensive, because it has what I think is a moving shoreline. Even though I was assured that it was a fairly stable beach line and was unlikely to change, I think there would be movement over time, but there are ways around that. The last I heard was that when the plan for north Bills Bay was looked at more seriously before it was eliminated, the intention was to use a pylon structure that would allow the shoreline to move without affecting the structure itself. If that is the case, I can accept that it would put more cost on the north Bills Bay option. However, when the escalation in the size and design is considered, the Monck Head site has escalated seriously in cost anyway. I think the original estimate was \$2.7 million. When consumer price index escalation is allowed for, the figure becomes \$3.5 million, and perhaps even \$4 million. However, even the people in the minister's own agency are saying that the structure could cost \$5.2 million, and that does not include the shore component; that is, the sealing of the road. The shire's estimate, which is documented in a report to councillors, estimates the figure to be closer to \$8.3 million. It is a very significant piece of infrastructure. If the Government is seriously considering spending \$8.3 million, there are a lot of reasons why the north Bills Bay option could be considered. I read the summary of the four sites. I will eliminate the north Monck Head and Mauds Landing sites. Table 1 on page 8 of the "Public Environmental Review for Two Proposals for the Development of a Single Boating Facility at Either Monck Head or North Bills Bay, Near Coral Bay", which was prepared for the Department for Planning and Infrastructure compares road access between north Bills Bay and Monck Head. The road access at north Bills Bay is non-existent and it is poor at Monck Head; it is just a gravel track to Monck Head. At this stage there is no road into the north Bills Bay site that requires to Point Maud. The part about access to open ocean is very revealing. The environmental review states that access to the ocean from north Bills Bay is good. Guess what? Access to the ocean from Monck Head is restricted and dangerous if the Yalobia passage is used. That review is a ringing endorsement for the siting of a boat ramp because it says that access to the ocean will be dangerous. The document compares the near shore depth between north Bills Bay and Monck Head, both of which are restricted. Other categories include storm surge hazard, for which both sites are moderate; breakwater, both of which are desirable; area for parking, for which, again, both are moderate; and, finally, relative cost, which is an interesting point and one I set out to get to, and which was also moderate. Clearly both sites are comparable. The shire seems to be suggesting in the review that the Monck Head ramp can be built for \$8.3 million and that the north Bills Bay ramp could be built for the same price, which surprises me. The size of the north Bills Bay ramp would have to be greater because, effectively, an outer breakwater would need to be

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created to cause the water to become smooth so that the boats that travelled into the bay would not be subjected to choppy conditions, caused by the southerly and south westerly winds, and could therefore easily negotiate the boat ramp.

I am suggesting to the minister - I know other members want to speak on this matter - that the Government should take a practical, realistic view of this. I think it should be environmentally responsible. That is why I have not made a greater issue of the environmental impact. However, certainly some environmental impacts must be considered. A comparison between the effect on the environment of building a boat ramp at either north Bills Bay or Monck Head shows that there would be no consequential difference to the environment by either proposition. The shire seems to suggest that the site at north Bills Bay could be developed for the same cost as the development at Monck Head; however, that may not be so. Changing the boundary of the Mauds sanctuary zone for the north Bills Bay development would be a very important requirement. One reason is that it would provide a safe navigational passage into Bateman Bay, or north Bills Bay as I shall call it, and out into the fishing area. The boats would then have immediately left the sanctuary zone. There is no reason to cross further into the sanctuary zone. People would not be able to catch fish, although they might want to dive or snorkel or whatever. I think that is a reason in itself to have another closer examination of the north Bills Bay option.

So far I have not discussed a matter that will be significant in the overall development; that is, the swing moorings. How many moorings will be laid at Monck Head for boats that want to stand off? In other words, a visiting boat of 20 or 30 feet in length might fuel up and want to sit on a mooring. There will not be room at the service jetty for boats to moor indefinitely. They will simply come alongside, take on water and fuel, and then anchor off. Where will they do that? It is clear that a provision will have to be made for permanent moorings for vessels to anchor up to and swing on those moorings. Whether a dozen or two dozen are provided, time will tell. I do not know of any sites at Monck Head at which it would be practical to place ancillary moorings to the boat ramp. On the other hand, north Bills Bay clearly lends itself to allowing more vessels to moor safely to take on supplies or whatever. I do not ridicule the minister, the Government or the task force that have arrived at the conclusion to site the boat ramp at Monck Head. I believe that a whole lot of pressing practical reasons have now come to light that warrant the halting of the process and a re-evaluation of the impact of recreational boat users and the escalation of the number of recreational boat users, because clearly a guiding principle when carrying out the Ningaloo coastal strategy was an attempt to balance the various land uses along the Ningaloo coast with the number of people who are likely to frequent the place. That strategy is supposed to last for 30 years, albeit with five-yearly reviews, but if it were applied as the basis for the modelling of all planning along the Ningaloo Reef, why not try to adopt the same for boat ramps? Why not ask how quickly the area will develop and how many more recreational boat users will be there? Must we look at limiting the number? As a consequence of that process the Government may say that even though the number of recreational boats will increase and the third boat ramp will be needed to accommodate that escalation in recreational boat numbers, it is not appropriate because of the extra pressure that will be applied to fisheries with the extra traffic, which must be taken into account in an assessment. I am simply saying that it seems to me that one set of planning principles has been applied to the Ningaloo coastal strategy but has not been applied in the assessment for the siting of the boat ramp, whether at Monck Head or north Bills Bay. I believe that the minister needs to travel to Carnarvon again and keep an open mind, which she has said she has had through this process. I believe that if she is objective in her assessment and visits the site again, it will be easy for her to see and to acknowledge that there is a preference for the north Bills Bay site over the Monck Head site.

**MS A.J. MacTIERNAN** (Armadale - Minister for Planning and Infrastructure) [5.57 pm]: I thank the member for raising these issues. They are issues of considerable controversy within the Coral Bay community. However, may I just make this point? We will not preside over a further decade of inaction. Nothing happened during the eight years in which the conservative Government was in power; nothing could be resolved, no decisions were made and no progress was made. The squalor continued to develop in that area. We have come in with a very clear agenda to address the problems. I acknowledge my friend the member for Peel and the constructive role he has played in helping us.

Mr R.N. Sweetman: Do you know what they call the member for Peel up there? The hood from Peel. What has he been doing?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: He is getting some results. Coral Bay now has sewerage in place. That is a first. We now have a strategic plan for the region. We are committed to building a boating facility. We will not let the chaos that reigns there now continue. Every time we get to within cooee of a decision, someone comes in from the left field and says that it is the wrong decision and that we should go back and start again. That is why we have had decades of inaction. We will not act like that. We will not accept it. We will move forward with something that is practical.

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Mr R.N. Sweetman: You have done things yourself that have tripped you up, like this alternative boating track that takes people back to Bateman Bay. It is absurd.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Just listen. We asked for a full environmental assessment on both those projects. We were quite agnostic about which we would build. Quite frankly, I think we had some preference for north Bills Bay. However, the Environmental Protection Authority report was absolutely unequivocal. It listed its reasons. The member might not agree with the reasons, and I understand some of the points that he is making, one of which is that sometimes man-made structures and interventions can in fact create their own biodiversity. I understand that argument, and I am not saying that it is without some merit. What I am saying to the member for Ningaloo is that the Environmental Protection Authority has made it very clear -

Mr C.J. Barnett: We want to know why the minister changed her mind.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: The member for Ningaloo, who is a decent and capable member of Parliament, has raised some issues of real concern. We want to address those issues. We do not want people who have no capacity other than to sledge and attack to be part of this debate. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to be part of this debate, let him get on his feet and defend Mauds Landing, which is what he wants to do. I understand the point that the member for Ningaloo has made. I am not an environmental scientist. However, the EPA has made it extremely clear. It has said that it is so unlikely that the proposal for a boating facility at north Bills Bay can be made environmentally acceptable that it refuses to even provide conditions. I could go through all of the issues, but I presume the member has read the report -

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas: What about the escalation in size?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I am talking just about north Bills Bay. I ask the member for Carine to show a bit of patience. I am trying to get through this. I presume the member for Ningaloo has read the EPA report. Is that correct?

Mr R.N. Sweetman: Perhaps not in its entirety, but I have certainly read the parts that apply to each of the local conditions.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: The EPA report states that in its opinion the following environmental factors relevant to the proposal require detailed evaluation: the marine biodiversity, the terrestrial biodiversity and the coastal processes. I could bore members for hours by reading section 3 of the -

Mr R.N. Sweetman: But in another part the EPA has said that it is not significant at the north Bills Bay site.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: The EPA report states that in respect of each of these factors, the impact is such that it is not prepared to stipulate what the conditions for development should be because it is not prepared to support development. That is a very unequivocal and unambiguous statement on the part of the EPA. As the member for Peel said, there are also federal processes in play that would make it very difficult. Whatever the merit may be, the reality is that we will not get environmental approvals for north Bills Bay. Therefore, we are not prepared to spend another three years trying to get environmental approval for north Bills Bay when all of the evidence suggests that we will never be able to make that development environmentally acceptable. I am not about to argue the technicalities with the member -

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas: Have you read the motion? The motion calls on the Government to subject the current proposal to independent assessment and, in paragraph (c), to report on whether the public environmental review for the previous smaller proposal is adequate in the revised circumstances.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I am talking about north Bills Bay.

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas: I am talking about Monck Head.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I am not talking about Monck Head. I am addressing the issue of north Bills Bay. I am sorry, but the member for Carine needs to read the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A. Templeman): Order, members! It is appropriate that the debate continue with one member at a time speaking. If a number of members are interjecting across the Chamber or carrying on conversations across the Chamber, it is not orderly.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: For the benefit of the member for Carine, who has been very impatient, I will outline the structure of the debate. The question is, first, is north Bills Bay a viable option; and, if it is, why do we not look at going back there. We are addressing the point of north Bills Bay. We are saying that the Environmental Protection Authority has put the unambiguous position that it is not prepared to even put conditions on north Bills Bay because it does not believe that north Bills Bay can be made environmentally acceptable. I do not need to read to members the provisions within the Environmental Protection Authority's report because I am sure they

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have read them. The report outlines the multiplicity of reasons the EPA believes this is the case, including the impact on birds, other marine life and coastal processes. I will not go into that detail; that is the statement. If we were to say that we were going back to north Bills Bay, that would involve another couple of years of environmental approvals with very little prospect of our getting any of the approvals. We would be acting like the Liberals - just going around in circles! We do not conduct government like that; we do not go around in circles achieving nothing. We want to fix the area. We are not going back to north Bills Bay.

We now come to the question of Monck Head. It is true that this has grown like Topsy; it is unbelievable. The engineer from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure has visited the area and has talked to everyone. Everyone has his little wish lists; he wants this and that and something else. It has grown massively. That is not the Government's position. The Government's position is very clear. There are minor adjustments to what we submitted for the environmental assessment. Some modifications can be made to the alignment to make it safer. Fundamentally, our instruction to the department is that we are proceeding with a facility that comes within the scope of the environmental approvals that we have obtained. We are not going out to build something bigger than *Ben Hur*; we are not building a massive land-backed wharf, marina and canal development that seems to be emerging from the process of everyone saying that they would like something added. I agree; it has gone crazy. That position has never been adopted by government. We have made it very clear that we will start construction around March-April next year, which is the right time weatherwise to build the structure. We are not going to seek a new range of environmental approvals. We will build within the existing envelope of environmental approvals. The adjustments that will be made will be very modest because we are getting on with the job. We know that Coral Bay is a bit like the taxi industry; if there are 50 people, there are 50 different ideas about what should be done. The member knows what it is like. At the end of the day, we will act decisively. The member has given some figures concerning need. We contest those. I know that some elements within the Department for Planning and Infrastructure have come up with some pretty big numbers. We are looking at the numbers of the Department of Conservation and Land Management, which are based on counts of activity. Those figures are far more modest. The majority of what is needed can be satisfied within a more limited structure, which the Government proposes to build.

The Government will build a two-lane boat ramp with two finger jetties, one of which will have service facilities in accordance with the approval received from the Minister for the Environment. There have been minor design changes to improve the angle of the ramp to the prevailing weather and to access deeper water. It has been swung around slightly to obtain better protection. The structure will be more environmentally friendly because we have changed the bridge structure. It was originally to be a partially culverted causeway but it will become a pile bridge. That will reduce the amount of fill required. There will be no change to the boating access at all, but there will be improvements in safety as environmental conditions include marking of the boat track to accepted safety standards. The track referred to by the member is the existing track; it is not a new track. The environmental conditions have indicated that we need to put in place clearer markings to protect the reef, not to mention the people in the boats. The coral in north Bills Bay comes in a lot closer and there would have to be very substantial dredging. As I understand it, here we are basically using the existing boating track but are being required to mark it as per the environmental conditions. I appreciate members raising this issue tonight, because it has been a matter of some controversy. It has also been of some concern to us in the way it has got a little out of hand. The Ningaloo sustainable development office is about to open and we look forward to having staff located there. There will then be a little more commonsense in the way we proceed with issues. I was going to propose an amendment so that this is on record in a formal way.

Mr R.N. Sweetman: The motion is set out on page 13 of the notice paper.

*Amendment to Motion*

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: I move -

To delete all words after "House" and substitute the following -

acknowledges that the construction of a boat ramp at north Bills Bay cannot be made environmentally acceptable and acknowledges the importance of proceeding promptly with the construction of a facility at Monck Head and recognises that the facility must comply with the terms of the environmental approvals already in place.

I recognise that there are problems with the scale of the facility that has been talked about recently. It is not that there is any status of any government approval whatsoever; but they came out of an exuberance of community participation. We would be in the same position if we were going to north Bills Bay, because we would have to get an entirely new set of environmental approvals without there being any guarantee that we would get that environmental approval for the megastructure as it emerged.



I appreciate members' concerns. As always, the member for Ningaloo has put forward a reasoned argument. I am not unsympathetic to the points he makes, but the practical reality is that we will never get the environmental approvals for north Bills Bay, so we have to get over it, move on and do something that we believe is practical and achievable to start getting a bit of order into the chaos.

**MS K. HODSON-THOMAS** (Carine) [6.13 pm]: May I have a copy of the minister's proposed amendment?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A. Templeman): Yes, we will provide the member with a copy.

Mr R.N. Sweetman interjected.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS**: Absolutely. It does not reflect the member for Ningaloo's motion at all.

I was hoping to get the call before the minister stood up. I cannot speak as intimately about the issue as the member for Ningaloo. It is his electorate and he knows the area intimately, he knows the communities and he is obviously very aware of the issues that have arisen, particularly in terms of the size of this proposed boat-launching ramp.

Last July I had the opportunity to visit the area with the member for Ningaloo and his wife. He encouraged me to go snorkelling, which I did. We went across the boating channel and out to the coral garden. At the time I felt uncomfortable, not because I felt that I was in any particular danger, but because I was so aware of the young children who were snorkelling in that region. The conflict between boats and snorkellers is a recipe for disaster. It is most fortunate that there has not been a mishap. I am sure there have been some close calls. I was constantly aware of the boats in the area; indeed, I felt that they were much too close to where I was snorkelling. I felt that I was the lookout for the member for Ningaloo while he looked at the beautiful coral.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: So you agree that we have to get boats out of the bay?

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS**: That is the point I am trying to make. We need to get recreational boats out of that area because it is a pristine environment.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: That is what the Monck Head option will do; it will get them out of the area.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS**: I understand that. However, in his motion the member for Ningaloo is trying to ensure that the boat-launching facility is suddenly not a mammoth launching facility that is bigger than *Ben Hur*. I understood what the minister said that everyone comes along with their wish list. I know what that is like.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: At the end of the day, it will be like me; very small.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS**: As I was saying, Mr Acting Speaker, the area is pristine and clearly we need to remove recreational boats from the area. We have to protect the environment and the snorkellers. People use the Coral Bay area for many recreational uses, including snorkelling, boating and sailing. The member for Ningaloo presented a cogent argument in the Chamber today. His motion asks for an independent assessment that will report on the environmental impact, the navigational and safety issues and whether the public environmental review for the previous smaller proposal is adequate in the revised circumstances. They have all been his concern. Will we now have a large boat-launching facility and, if it is compared with the north Bills Bay alternative, how will its environmental assessment be viewed? The minister has moved an amendment to the motion, which seeks to delete all the words after "House" and substitute the following -

acknowledges that the construction of a boat ramp at north Bills Bay can not be made environmentally acceptable and acknowledges the importance of proceeding promptly with the construction of a facility at Monck Head and recognises that the facility must be comply with the terms of the environmental approvals already in place.

I am not as convinced as the minister. There could be an opportunity to review that.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: There can't be. When I stand up I will tell you why.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS**: Both the member for Peel and I need to be out of the House very soon because we have engagements in our electorates. I will give the member for Peel an opportunity to speak because I am interested in this issue. It is very important that we get recreational boats out of that area, away from the coral and into an acceptable environment that does not damage the very pristine reef system in that area. I went to Monck Head with the member for Ningaloo. I even went to Mauds Landing, Exmouth and along the Ningaloo coastline. I was absolutely flabbergasted by the number of illegal campers. We can rewrite history and say that the previous Government did nothing for eight years. However, I believe that the Mauds Landing proposal was a good one. People do not understand what is going on in that environment. I am interested in what the member for Peel has to say in this debate. With those few comments, let us hear from the member for Peel.

**MR N.R. MARLBOROUGH** (Peel - Parliamentary Secretary) [6.19 pm]: I will try to paint a picture, because I do not think we are too far apart. The member for Ningaloo indicated by way of interjection that he is still suffering from the scars of handling the views of the people of Coral Bay. We all suffer from that. Let us go back a little in history. Two and a half years ago I was asked by the Government to chair the task force into putting infrastructure in place in Coral Bay. I had no vested interest in whether the boat ramp went to north Bills Bay or Monck Head. The first day I arrived in Coral Bay, I called a public meeting, to which 60 people turned up. When members realise that only 154 people live there permanently, they will understand that that was a massive turnout. On the first day I met those people I said, "To the degree that we need to get on with fixing the infrastructure, and from where I stand at the moment, let us all agree in this room that there is no value in a Government, regardless of its political colour, arguing against the outcome of an Environmental Protection Authority report that states where the boat ramp should go. If any of you here can give me advice that I, as a member of the Government, should rail against that EPA report and advise the minister that, having received an EPA report, the Government should say 'stick it up your jacksy', I'm willing to listen." All 60 in the room understood, because I started by saying, "Let's fix the problem." I have no vested interest. I do not own a boat and I do not recreate permanently at Coral Bay. It is a magnificent place. However, because of its environmental requirements, this area is now not only on the state and national scene - I will go into detail on that - but also on the world stage from an environmental point of view. If someone sneezes today in the waters of Coral Bay, London wants to know why. That is what we are now faced with.

There are not one or two environmental reports on north Bills Bay; there are five major environmental reports, two of which are commonwealth reports. As a result of the commonwealth reports under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, any attempt to carry out work in those sanctuary zones gazetted by the Commonwealth will trigger a commonwealth process of environmental review, which the State, regardless of who is in government, has no control over. The Commonwealth runs its processes at its own speed. We do not want to revisit that. It is absolutely clear from the EPA report that there is no evidence to support the building of a marina in north Bills Bay.

At the request of the Premier, who had been approached by local residents of Coral Bay, I went back to Coral Bay two or three weeks ago to have a meeting with them. Sorry; I flew into Coral Bay with the Premier five weeks ago when we opened the sewage treatment plant. That is a facility that we have put in place since we have been in government. Part of the process that I chaired was about putting that facility in place. The locals met with the Premier. The Premier approached me and said, "Norm, there are concerns over where the boat ramp will go." I then met with the residents, including Graham Murphy and Doug Hunt, and said, "Let's agree on these grounds: if in the next two weeks you can find the evidence to reject the environmental scientific report on which the EPA has based its report, and/or if you can convince me of safety concerns, that should be the evidence by which the Government changes its mind." They agreed to that. I came back to the city. I went back to Coral Bay two weeks ago, which was three weeks after that meeting. We had all day together. They were not able to produce any evidence to refute the EPA's report. In fact, it got to the stage at which certain persons in the party talked about moving the boat ramp a bit further south than Monck Head; a visual thing was their concern.

When they had no scientific evidence, they tried, as did the member for Ningaloo, to downplay and denigrate the existing science used by the EPA. They said that a professor came up for only a week, so he could not have known and his report was a nonsense. They said that the process behind a report lasted only two weeks, so the people involved would not have known. Rather than provide scientific evidence to the contrary, they tried to denigrate the standard of reporting that had been done. I pointed out to them that in the public Environmental Protection Authority process, which had been open for community input, nobody from Coral Bay or any other organisation had written anything against the EPA's report on north Bills Bay not being an appropriate site. Do members know what they said to me? They told me that the reason they did not make a submission was that when I had told them two years ago that the Government would build a sewage treatment plant, they thought I was like all other politicians - that is, all mouth - and that nothing would happen. On the basis that they believed nothing would happen, they decided when I approached them about the boat ramp that nothing would happen on that either, so they would not bother. However, now that the sewage treatment plant was in place and they had seen that we were doing something and that things were going to happen, they were interested in having input. I told them that they actually wanted to penalise us for doing something. That is Coral Bay! The member for Ningaloo is smiling. He knows that what I am saying is the truth, because I am sure he has been through it himself.

The minister said that through this process, a marine engineer from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure has been liaising with the local community. This will interest the member for Ningaloo. The committee that is advising the engineer is made up of locals from Coral Bay. There is an amazing diversity of

views among those people on what is needed for a boat ramp. For example, the fellow who runs a catamaran business told me that he does not want a boat ramp, yet he chairs the local community group and has been sitting on that committee. He told me his position three weeks ago when I was up there. Regardless of the community position, his position was that he did not see any need for a boat ramp because he ran a catamaran business. On the other hand are the requirements of one of the other boat operators who sits on the committee. I have on record with me the written submissions that they made to the engineer. Honestly, her requirements for a boating facility indicate that she is seeking a mini Fremantle Harbour. She wants the full works. She wants lifting facilities to lift boats out of the water and a dry dock, so that she can drop engines out of the boats and be able to do a major overhaul. On the committee advising the engineer was a group of people whose views went as broad as not wanting anything to wanting Fremantle Harbour. What the engineer tried to do, rightly or wrongly, was to meet those demands in the best way possible within certain parameters. In meeting those demands, as the minister correctly said, we now have something that is bigger than Methuselah. It will be scaled down. It needs to come within the parameters that the EPA gave to the Government.

Prior to going to Coral Bay three weeks ago I called together all the key players at a meeting in Fremantle with the DPI, the EPA and the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority. As chairman of the task force I brought together all the key people who had been involved in this process so that they could bring me up to date with their position and on how they had got to the current boat ramp design. It was clear from that meeting that we had a boat ramp that was a lot bigger than was originally envisaged. It was also clear on that Friday before I went to Coral Bay that the size of the proposed boat ramp had impacted on the sanctuary zone at a level that I believed the EPA would not accept anyway. It has not yet got to the EPA process, but I knew when I saw the plans that it would not meet the EPA requirements. The minister clearly indicated that we must meet the EPA requirements. Therefore, that boat ramp facility will be scaled back. Members should bear in mind that we asked the engineer to plan it for a 20-year time frame. Why build today what will be needed in 20 years? Member must also bear in mind that the diversion of opinions on the committee, which comprised local people, was very broad. Opinions went from that of one member who ran catamarans and did not want a boat facility to that of another member who wanted something like Fremantle harbour in place so that that person could do major maintenance. The key is that we all agree that those boats must be moved. The member for Carine indicated that she was at Coral Bay recently and, having snorkelled over the reef, found that one thing that frightened her was the boat movements within Coral Bay. The move to Monck Head will absolutely guarantee safety from those boat movements. It must be done in conjunction with proper marine management, which will be in the hands of the Department of Conservation and Land Management. That has to be done, and all the boat owners know that. A move to Monck Head will get those boats out of there.

Members should forget about revisiting the environmental arguments about north Bills Bay. Those arguments have been revisited and tested, the public process has been in place, and the matter needs to be gotten on with. Somehow, magically, the marine department has kept \$4 million in budget since the Opposition's time in government and that money is still available in our time.

Mr R.N. Sweetman: We put in the first two and a half million.

Mr N.R. MARLBOROUGH: Exactly. However, the member should ask himself how much further we can delay this matter and guarantee that we will hang onto that \$4 million. Everybody sniffs around after that sort of money. Every other department says that if we are not using the money this year, why do we not give it to them. I am very concerned to hang onto it. We are committed to completing this project and the minister has already set the time frame. We want to go to design and construct next March and we want to have it in place at a scale that is agreeable. I will show the member the scale before it goes ahead. I am more than happy for the member to have a look at the document. As chair of the working party, I offer him a look at all of the documents. We do not want to put it in way over scale. We do not want to impact on a sanctuary zone. We do not want to damage the reef. We do not want to put children at risk by having boat movements in the bay where they are snorkelling. All of those concerns will be met. The process we have gone through is driven by this large model that will come back and meet environmental standards. However, by definition, if it meets environmental standards, it will not be able to go into north Bills Bay. We are going ahead and it will be to a proper standard, a proper quality and a proper size and it will be at Monck Head. The sooner we convince the community and the local member on that, the better off we all will be so that we can all bathe in the luxury of having this fantastic facility in place for the four and a half thousand tourists a day who go there at peak time in September and October. If we start to build it in March, we can have it completed by September or October next year.

I will just finish on my role as chair. There will be an election between now and the completion of the boat ramp, but if this Government is re-elected and I am still in the position of chair, my role will be to oversee this piece of infrastructure. As well, as a Government, we are already looking at the housing that is needed there. The big demand in Coral Bay today from the 154 people who live there is for accommodation. We already have

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a process in place, which I chair, to consider how to provide that accommodation, how to design it, whether the Government should take part in it or whether it should be built by the private sector, and so on. The planning of the town is part of the process. We must get emergency services in the right place, as they are not in the right place now. We must get the electricity supply on, as currently it is all higgledy-piggledy, in private hands and not legal or meeting any supply standard. Getting the electricity supply on tap is all part of providing for a community that for 35 years has grown like Topsy. It has somehow succeeded, but it is now time to put in place world best environmental standards because that is how Coral Bay is regarded today by the world. It needs world best safety standards. It needs world best infrastructure. I believe the process that I am chairing and the Government has entered into will provide all of those aspects to the satisfaction of not only the Government but also the member for Ningaloo, the local member.

**MR R.N. SWEETMAN** (Ningaloo) [6.34 pm]: I take on board everything that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the member for Peel have said. However, I find it very hard to accept the amendment and I will be voting against it. The motion that I moved basically calls on the Government to “subject the current proposal to independent assessment and to report on”. In other words, we will be convinced by the science. Just give us the science; give us further validation of the conditions that the Environmental Protection Authority put against this project. The wording of the amendment to the motion is contrary to that. It reads -

That this House acknowledges that the construction of a boat ramp at north Bills Bay cannot be made environmentally acceptable and acknowledges the importance of proceeding promptly . . .

That must go close to negating the motion. I am simply saying that if the EPA is relying on environmental science, then independent assessment by equally eminent qualified marine and terrestrial scientists will validate the findings and the recommendations of the EPA; that is all I have been arguing for. In the event that an independent assessment says that the lesser of the two evils is Monck Head, then I can die happy. I can support the minister and the member for Peel in their argument. However, I am not convinced, and a whole lot of other people are not convinced either, and for those reasons I will be opposing the amendment.

Amendment (deletion of words) put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (25)

Mr P.W. Andrews	Mr J.N. Hyde	Ms S.M. McHale	Mr E.S. Ripper
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr A.D. McRae	Mrs M.H. Roberts
Mr A.J. Carpenter	Mr R.C. Kucera	Mr N.R. Marlborough	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr A.J. Dean	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms M.M. Quirk ( <i>Teller</i> )
Dr J.M. Edwards	Ms A.J. MacTiernan	Mr A.P. O’Gorman	
Mrs D.J. Guise	Mr J.A. McGinty	Mr J.R. Quigley	
Mr S.R. Hill	Mr M. McGowan	Ms J.A. Radisich	

Noes (12)

Mr R.A. Ainsworth	Mr M.J. Birney	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr P.G. Pandal
Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr M.F. Board	Mrs C.L. Edwardes	Mr R.N. Sweetman
Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan	Dr E. Constable	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr J.L. Bradshaw ( <i>Teller</i> )

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Pairs

Mr P.B. Watson	Mr J.P.D. Edwards
Mrs C.A. Martin	Mr A.D. Marshall
Mr C.M. Brown	Mr P.D. Omodei
Mr J.B. D’Orazio	Ms S.E. Walker
Dr G.I. Gallop	Ms K. Hodson-Thomas

Independent Pair

Dr J.M. Woollard

Amendment thus passed.

Amendment (insertion of words) put and passed.

*Motion, as Amended*

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

**Extract from *Hansard***  
[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 15 September 2004]  
p5939c-5950a

Mr Rod Sweetman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Acting Speaker; Mr Norm Marlborough

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Ayes (25)

Mr P.W. Andrews	Mr J.N. Hyde	Ms S.M. McHale	Mr E.S. Ripper
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr A.D. McRae	Mrs M.H. Roberts
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Mr J.B. D’Orazio	Ms S.E. Walker
Dr G.I. Gallop	Ms K. Hodson-Thomas

Independent Pair

Dr J.M. Woollard

Question thus passed.

*House adjourned at 6.43 pm*

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