

## PLANNING AUTHORITIES

### *Statement*

**HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan)** [10.07 pm]: Just before I am damned with faint praise —  
A government member interjected.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Thank you very much for the appreciation.

I wish to speak briefly. It is not my intention to detain the house beyond what is reasonable. I want to address an emerging issue; that is, the state of the Western Australian planning system. I believe there to be widespread community dissatisfaction with the Western Australian planning framework, the system that operates under that framework, and the decisions taken by delegated authorities under the act. Yesterday, my colleague Hon Simon O'Brien tabled a petition signed by some 2 000 people requesting this Council to initiate an investigation into the planning framework, its administration, and its rules and regulations. It would appear that for a significant number of people across at least the Perth metropolitan area the planning system and the decisions taken within it are failing to meet the best interests of the communities they affect in the immediate term and into the future. These people should not be derided as nimbies. They are individuals, families and community groups with legitimate grievances and with significant, deep and long-lasting connections to their community. They are concerned about their community and their community's fabric. They also share some common grievances and concerns with different groups that might have their own individual localised challenge but seem to face similar issues.

There is an emerging view that the planning framework and its system is weighted against the community. The decisions taken by local government authorities, development assessment panels, the Western Australian Planning Commission and even, on occasion, the minister have caused and continue to cause deep and abiding community anxiety. It matters not if the community is in Woodvale, Iluka, Duncraig, Shenton Park, Daglish, Jandakot, Nedlands, Henley Brook or the Perth hills, or if it is unfortunate enough to witness what is going on around the Canning Bridge precinct. There is evidently a loss of public confidence in the planning system and I think that is problematic for everybody who operates within that system. It is problematic for professional planners, it is problematic for the development industry and it is certainly problematic for the community itself. It is against this backdrop of concerns, which have been consistently articulated in this place and have been developing a certain level of intensity as we proceed, that the West Australian Ratepayers and Residents Association was compelled to write to the Premier and the Minister for Planning at the end of last week, and I was included in that correspondence. That letter outlines a range of concerns with the current system and framework, but it was motivated in part by a piece of correspondence that the Minister for Planning sent to local government authorities last week, directed to mayors and CEOs. To be charitable, I think the minister was attempting to do the right thing. Her injunction was effectively to fast-track development applications when it can be done. Against this broader level of anxiety and upset, members can understand why communities are aghast and concerned that appropriate levels of decision-making, scrutiny of technical reports and implications for communities will not be taken into account. By virtue of the fact that physical distancing—often referred to as social distancing—provisions are taking effect, community groups are effectively locked out of the decision-making process, whether it be taken in council or by DAPs. That is of concern to me.

I will quote directly from this letter and I will table it. I quote from page 3 of a four-page letter signed by the chairman of the group, Mr Clive Ross, and the secretary, Beth Hewitt. This is an integral paragraph —

We also note with concern the letter from the Minister for Planning to the President of the West Australian Local Government Association ... dated 25 March 2020 essentially directing Local Government Authorities to fast-track planning approvals. The Minister should be fully aware that the community are currently locked out of these considerations and the community will not be afforded their right to be heard. This is neither fair, nor transparent as this communication was not sent to the community or widely advertised and is certainly not in the best long-term interests of Western Australia or the community.

I completely sympathise with that sentiment. I think it is a worthy cautionary injunction against rapidity—against haste—because even with the best of intentions, and with decisions being made in this heated environment at the local level, once we emerge on the other side of this and the emergency is lifted, people will be living with the consequences of these planning decisions for decades, and they will rue the bad ones. The people who profit will move on but the community groups will continue to be affected.

I do not believe—this is in contradiction to the minister's injunction—that there is any necessity for haste. If we want to keep economic growth, keep investment and ensure some confidence, I think the government should focus on the bigger picture industrial pieces that contribute to the economic foundations of the state. It should be concentrating on those kinds of investments that are likely to be worth tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars and, frankly, and without prejudice, it should not be concentrating on approving a slew of childcare centres or group dwellings that might have a \$3 million construction cost because that will not give the kind of economic uplift that is being sought.

Just to conclude this point, my suggestion here is one of caution. It seems to be one that is also shared by the Western Australian Planning Commission, which in recent days has overturned its own decision to trammel down and make a decision on the North Stoneville structure plan by 30 April. It has deferred that by another three or four months. The Western Australian Planning Commission—no insult is intended towards the minister—seems to have made a prudent decision that disregards its minister's injunction. I would encourage local government authorities to follow suit and apply utmost caution, discretion and integrity to their decision-making, even under the cloud of COVID-19. I seek leave to table the letter I referred to earlier.

Leave granted. [See paper [3759](#).]