

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMISSION, UNFAIR DISMISSAL
APPLICATIONS DATA

689. Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO to the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection:

I refer to the forty-first annual report handed down by the Chief Commissioner of the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. What trend is evident from the data presented on the number of unfair dismissal applications lodged with the commission?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for Ballajura for his question. The member for Ballajura is an experienced small businessman and he understands that the unfair dismissal system has to be not only fair to workers so that they can have their grievance for unfair dismissal properly heard, but also fair and efficient for small businesses so that nuisance claims for unfair dismissals, for which there is no basis, are not made against them. When the Government made changes in 2002, it set out to reverse what the previous Liberal Government had done. It set out to make sure that we had an unfair dismissal system that works. A report recently tabled by the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission shows that the number of applications lodged for unfair dismissal in 2003-04 was 762. In 2001-02, the last year of the system established by the Liberal Party, 1 141 applications were made. That is a reduction of 32 per cent. When I introduced the legislation, I said that if we put in place a fair system to deal with dismissals, make sure that it works properly and do something about nuisance claims, we would have fewer applications. On many occasions members opposite have said things that we on this side of the House know are factually wrong. If members opposite did their work, they too would know that those things are factually wrong. We all have a go at predictions. Sometimes we get them right. However, the other side of the House nearly always gets them wrong. On 26 March 2002, on page 8952 of *Hansard*, when commenting on my desire to reduce the number of unfair dismissals, the member for Kingsley said -

The impact the minister is expecting of a reduction of a quarter of unfair dismissal cases will not occur.

That reduction did occur. We did not just get a 25 per cent reduction; we got a 32 per cent reduction. The Leader of the Opposition's office commented on the same legislation. The office's press release of 16 May stated that -

"It's a sorry day for Western Australian businesses and workers when a Government seeks to ram through Parliament a Bill which many people consider will have a seriously detrimental impact on the economy, business operators and employment prospects."

Again, that is a failed prediction. According to the Opposition, the State's employment prospects would go down. However, we now have record low unemployment at 4.8 per cent. What about the impact on business operators? Survey after survey has shown that optimism among business is at an all time high. Again, the Opposition was wrong on that prediction. The Opposition said that the State's economy would suffer from this Government's industrial relations changes. However, we have fantastic economic growth. We are experiencing labour shortages because the economy is travelling so fast. All the Opposition wants to do is to go back to its glorious old days of eight budgets, five deficits and privatisation and to the days in which it could not manage the economy and could not get people jobs. All it wants to do is knock, knock, knock.