

TOWN PLANNING SCHEME AMENDMENTS, BACKLOG

1019. Mrs C.L. EDWARDES to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

I refer to the December 2002 edition of the *WA Property News*, which detailed the concerns of the Property Council of Australia about the length of time taken for scheme amendments to be processed. The article says that approvals have slowed to a trickle, which is a problem the minister still has not addressed.

- (1) Is the minister aware that the delays in her office and of the Western Australian Planning Commission and the Department for Planning and Infrastructure in approving scheme amendments is having an impact on affordable housing lots for first home buyers and has increased the price of lots by up to \$10 000 per lot?
- (2) Given the windfall stamp duty the Government will collect through massive tax increases and the increased prices of the lots, will the minister increase the resources of her department to deal with the backlog?
- (3) If not, what will the minister do to ensure there will not be a shortage of land and that housing lots for first home buyers will be affordable?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN replied:

- (1)-(3) The member for Hillarys' information is very out of date, and with considerable pride I advise that there is absolutely no backlog in my department.

Mr C.J. Barnett: The member for Kingsley.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Sorry, the member for Kingsley. We are getting a bit confused. The member for Hillarys' information is out of date -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr R.F. Johnson: I know you've got a fixation on me.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: That is correct. That is the first truth we have heard from the member for Hillarys for a long time. The member for Kingsley is interested in this answer. Unfortunately, her information is very out of date. I am pleased to advise that there is absolutely no backlog in the signing off of town planning scheme amendments in my department.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes interjected.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: No, I will go through this. Yesterday we signed off on town planning scheme amendments that had been approved by the commission only in the past week. We completely cleared that backlog in presentations to my department.

It is true that there have been, and still are, problems in getting the number of subdivision approvals through the commission in a timely way, and we have acknowledged that. That is due partly to a problem in attracting planners to the department. The amount paid to planners by the private sector and local government has traditionally been a lot higher than that paid by the State Government. However, we have had a very vigorous recruitment program to attract new planners and in recent months 11 new planners have been recruited to the department. We have a special blitz team of six, which is clearing the backlog of subdivision approvals.

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Would the Leader of the Opposition like to make his comments a little louder, instead of continuing his time-honoured practice of sledging?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: That is right; the coward's way is the preferred way.

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN: Special management processes have been instituted in that statutory planning division and a committee has been set up with the Urban Development Institute of Australia, the Property Council of Australia and the Western Australian Local Government Association to oversee this process so that we can work collaboratively to clear the backlog. I acknowledge that there have been delays in the department's approving

many of these subdivision applications. The trend line is improving quite dramatically. However, intensive effort has been made to clear that backlog and we are working with industry. Last week 83 subdivision applications were approved. About 26 000 housing lots have conditional approval and are simply waiting for developers to satisfy the conditions that have been imposed by council to clear those conditions. In all, there has been a problem. We recognise that; we have always recognised that. We have made an intensive management effort to address it. We are working constructively with the Property Council, UDIA and WALGA to sort this through. We are confident that certainly by the end of the year much of that backlog will be dealt with and that the vast majority of subdivision applications will now be processed within three months.